

# The Reflector

2020

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# The Reflector

Shippensburg University's  
Journal of the Arts

2020

# The Reflector



The Reflector, founded in 1957, is the annual Undergraduate Arts Journal financed by the Student Government Association of Shippensburg University. We accept works of fiction, nonfiction, poetry, interviews, and artwork year-round. Works are considered for publication based on blind submission policy. Submissions are accepted electronically at [reflect@ship.edu](mailto:reflect@ship.edu). All writers/artists retain rights to their work.

For questions regarding our submission policy, contact: [reflect@ship.edu](mailto:reflect@ship.edu). Visit The Reflector on our Facebook or Instagram, The Reflector. The Reflector office is located in the old section of Shippensburg University, in the Creative Writing Wing of Horton Hall, Room 301.

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# A Letter From the Editor

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Dear Reader,

I was always told to never start a piece of writing with a cliché, but I can't seem to help it here: it seems just like yesterday I was walking into Horton to attend my first Reflector meeting. I was a Sophomore, and way more nervous than I'd like to admit. That's always been one of my flaws: I get overly anxious about the tiniest things sometimes. For whatever reason, the idea of going to a club meeting by myself and being surrounded by all of these people who I didn't know *terrified* me. I had almost talked myself out of not going, but at the last second, I asked myself "What's the worst that can happen?" and I went.

There have been many times throughout my undergraduate career that I've reflected on that moment, and wondered what would have happened if I had chosen to leave—if I had let my anxiety win over and stayed to what was comfortable. The consensus that I have often come to is that my experience at Shippensburg would have been incredibly different. By choosing to go to that meeting, and all the other ones thereafter, I have met people who I can indefinitely say are my best friends and have had the pleasure to work with the most creative and hard-working students and faculty this university can offer. If you had told me three years ago that a publication would grow to mean so much to me and that the thought of ever leaving it feels like I'm losing a part of myself, I don't think I would have believed you.

On this note of encouragement, I think it is also necessary to address how this journal wouldn't even exist if not for those who overcame their anxiety in submitting work to be published. It's a scary thing to put yourself out there and try new things (believe me, I know) and to push aside that overwhelming fear of the unknown to experience all the possibilities that life has to offer takes courage. The fear of rejection is always an obstacle that hinders our actions, and so my hope is that this journal is a representative artifact of what

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happens when we take risks. I'm extraordinarily proud of the work that is showcased here, and therefore, beyond proud of the creators we have published within it. To date, this is our largest publication and I hope that our club continues to encourage the student body in taking artistic risks such as the ones showcased within these pages.

Of course, none of this would have been possible if not for our staff. They have, perhaps, the most difficult job one could ever ask of them: to judge the work that has been submitted and decide what gets to be published. Someone asked me once how this process works, or more specifically, how is a club able to find students who can commit to such a time-consuming job? The best answer I can provide is that this organization has always been filled with devoted students who have a passion for the arts and who strive to make this campus a more artistic one. It's not a normal group, that's for certain, but I know that without a doubt I could not have been given a better group of people to work with. Although my time with *The Reflector* is coming to a close, I know that I am leaving it in capable hands.

Additionally, with the support of our Associate Editor, Angela Piper, and our PR Chair, Luke Hershey, this book would not be sitting before you. They have gone above and beyond to reach expectations to make this organization run as smoothly as it does. Our advisor, Dr. Nicole Santalucia, is also equally amazing with her constant guidance and advice. All of these people are dedicated and have made *The Reflector's* success a reality. They, honestly, are what have made my last year here at Shippensburg the most incredible it could have been.

I have many hopes for this book, but I ultimately hope this book speaks to you in more ways than one and that a desire to continue creating has been sparked. Art is what keeps us grounded and what continues to ignite joy and inspire change to whoever may see it. The biggest roadblock that we come across, however, is this component of the unknown. Fear is often what halts us in our steps,

and that pesky question of “What If?” sometimes guides us more than we’d like it to.

So, if you won’t hear it from anyone else today, you’ll hear it from me: the best thing you can do for yourself is to take risks, and if you’re scared to do it, then you know you’re on the right path.

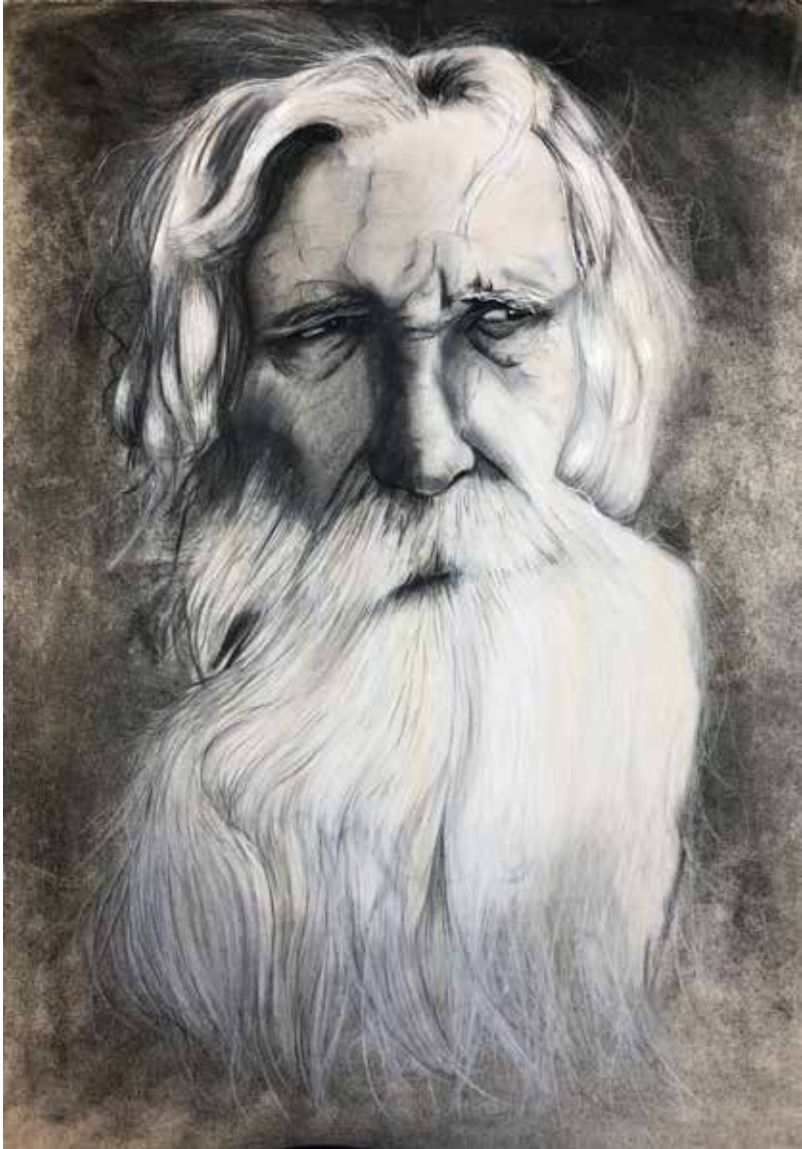
It may just change your life forever.

Yours truly,  
Anna D’Orazio

**/or**

*Time*

First Place | Carragher-Pound Prize of Excellence



*Kelley Moriarty*

# *Dying Garden*

Second Place | Carragher-Pound Prize of Excellence

I am a garden of dying roses  
 My grass a brittle brown  
 You rip my flowers off their branches  
 And smash them on the ground  
 Watch my oozing crimson petals  
 Bleed into a colorful mural of pain  
 My dull thorns crumble into dust  
 I have wasted away

I am a garden of dying roses  
 Wilting in a rainless box  
 My quivering skeletal branches fall to the earth in heaps  
 Blossoms collapse in a bloody chaos  
 The emptiness consumes me  
 I am dying  
 Petal by rotting petal  
 I have faded out of existence into the abysmal void of nothing

*Kimberly Braet*



## *My Grandmother's Garden*

Third Place | Carragher-Pound Prize of Excellence

Grandma always told me the air tasted different before the earth died, before the invention of artificial oxygen. That it was alive with an energy that “the fake stuff” didn’t have and it always made me wonder what that energy could be. Maybe Grandma could feel the lives of other creatures breathing the way she did. Maybe those creatures put out an energy on their exhale that can’t be replicated. Or maybe Grandma just remembers it romantically and nothing was ever really different. But then she reminded me of plants.

Her stories always started in the backyard of her parents’ house. She grew up on one of the last farms in the world and she never let me forget it. “The hills sang, Esperanza,” she’d say. “The apple trees whistled with the wind in a tune unheard.”

I’d always ask what they were like. How they smelled and felt and tasted.

And she’d always reply, “Alive” with a look in her eyes resembling love. That look always reminded me that she grew up in the Plant Protests nearly a century ago now. When world governments were still trying to convince people that plants were no longer necessary for the survival of human beings. That they were simply wasted space.

Seeing those pictures of people tying themselves to trees and lying flat on patches of grass makes me laugh. It was like they thought they were trees themselves or that they were one with the ground. How anyone could ever believe that is beyond me.

When she answered this way, I would demand to know what she meant. Looking back I’m sure that no matter how she explained it, I would never understand. In the same way, I’ll never understand the poets who praise nature, because I’ve never witnessed it. I’ve never stood, like the protesters, with my back to a tree. I’ve never even seen one in real life.

My favorite stories were the ones she told of flowers. “They bloomed,” she said. “Flowers colored the field outside my window in

reds and yellows and blues and greens and when the sun hit them just so... a kaleidoscope would paint my bedroom walls.”

We tried one summer, when she was too hampered by age to leave the bed, to recreate the effect. Her bay windows took days to paint, but by the time we’d finished she’d already passed.

The paint was beautiful, and I sat for hours in the early light of morning just to see the effect. But I’m positive it wasn’t the same as her flower colored, kaleidoscope walls.

Grandma always said the plants died when she was young, but, to me, they died with her because there was more beauty in the color of her stories than there would ever be in the color of this artificial world.

*Groovy Voyage*



*Cameron Conroy*

## *For Carol*

She came into my life when the bad guys were winning.  
 She said I've been there and I'll try to help.  
 Her heart was a reflection of compassionate love.  
 In her eyes, the soul of a warrior.  
 A soul that said, together we can get through this.

Three times in the next year I asked for her hand.  
 Three times that year she said no.  
 Finally, I didn't need her anymore and told her.  
 Not in the sense of needing her help.  
 Now I just needed her so I could breath.  
 Being without her was like having air taken away.  
 So, one more time, I said "Be my wife."  
 She said yes and "I thought you'd never ask!"

A quarter of a century has passed.  
 I still lean on her.  
 But sometimes she leans on me too.  
 I still look in her eyes.  
 I still see the soul that says: Together.

That quarter of a century hasn't reduced her beauty.  
 She's still the best-looking lady in any room.  
 Now and then in the evening when we're home alone,  
 She won't see me just looking at her.  
 I never get tired of just looking at her.  
 My world could end with one more look at her.

I often wonder in those moments  
 If my tomorrow never comes,  
 Will she know how I loved her today?  
 A love so real that it scares me.  
 A love so real that when I touch her skin  
 My fingertips actually tingle.  
 The passion of our humanity too intense to contain.

How do I tell her without useless clichés?

Do I talk of her smile or of her infectious laugh?  
Do I tell her I never want to get into a battle of wits with her?  
I know she could bury me with her brain in that conflict.  
Do I say “Please let me grow old with you by my side?”  
No, none of those will work.  
Words are futile.  
I simply say thank you.  
Thank you for loving me as much as I love you.

*Shrouded Truth*



*Ryan Krueger*

## *The Ladder Builder*

*Inspired by Robert Frost's "After Apple-Picking"*

I build my long, two-pointed ladder higher  
always reaching towards the top.  
There are piles of leaves below me,  
the kind you would dive into as a kid—  
I know they will not catch me soft,  
so I climb down,  
I am done with ladder building now.  
I am going to find company  
that will help me forget my aching shoulders  
and the roughness built into my hands.

The evening will fall early,  
but I know that this shared laughter will not,  
love flying around in all directions  
over empty apple-cider mugs.  
The weight of the thought  
of the next day's work  
pushes me to bed.  
There are ten thousand rungs to be built,  
so many that repetition repeats itself.

I go to sleep knowing the next day  
will bring the same feeling of never being able  
to reach the top, reach the end,  
but also the same crisp air,  
the same love flying around evening tables,  
the same beautiful leaves  
falling beside me as I climb  
my endless ladder towards the skies.

## Obscurity

Rays of sunshine layered themselves between the tangled branches, skewering the sky into a mosaic of blue and white hues. A breeze wisped itself between the tree trunks before teetering off into the clearing below and disappearing in the loose tendrils of Zahra's hair. She sat amongst the tall, paling grass, with her fingertips buried in the dried earth and the apples of her cheeks angled to the treetops. The ghost of a smile rested between her parted lips.

Her chest rose and fell in deep breaths as she slowly molded herself against the earth to peer upward. The sun flickered through the bobbing leaves, catching in her eyes and accentuating the green specks floating in her irises. She was radiant lying there, cradled by the earth.

*Serene, she thought. Not a care in the world to be had here, Zahra.*

Here in this patch, this personal haven she had stumbled across so many months ago, she was free. The forest had opened up before her, bowing and buzzing with joy as she glided through the threshold of the clearing. Eleven towering oak's formed a barrier around the patch like guards, long branches crossing in the treetops to make a grand canopy.

*Safe, she thought. Reassured.*

A stronger gust of wind broke into the clearing and urged the wispy grass against her, the blades abruptly kissing at her skin. The greenery above rustled warningly and she curled her fingers as she used her forearm to lift herself back up. Some rebellious baby hairs—unbothered by her earlier attempt to restrain them—drummed against her forehead as the breeze circled around her, taunting her in faux tornadoes.

*Not here, she chanted to herself. Never here.*

The trees swayed in the sky, bending and twisting their branches together tighter, tighter, tighter. Soon the sky was shielded from view and the air grew cold as a malevolent cloud crawled over the blue canvas and began rapidly eating away at the sun. Her skin was taugth, goosebumps



running down her exposed legs in a manner akin to an alarm.

Go. The word had never existed in this space before but it was suddenly plastered in her vision, spelled out in the mangled brush beyond the barrier oaks. *Run, Zahra.*

The ground moved from beneath her as she stood, freckled knees locked and tentative arms crossed over her chest. Loose hairs at the back of her neck were slicked to her skin from the gleam of sweat sprouting from her pores.

*It'll find you,* this voice was different. *Run, run, run...*

A figure never clear, always a blur anchoring itself at the edge of her vision, playing the part of a trick of the eyes. The trees were deserter's in this ongoing game, playing the part of guardians but allowing it to cloister just beyond the clearing. Jeering at her, prodding with temptation and empty promises meant to leave her void.

*It found you.* Frozen, petrified amidst the traitorous trees, she crumbled. *I've found you, Zahra.*

*Ocean Lovers*

The sunbeams dance across the sand  
and my heart fills with the glow in your eyes  
I long for the feeling of your hands in mine  
Our souls tumble under the waves like broken sea glass  
Our laughter was meant to wash away the fear that all will be shattered  
and we will be two broken promises  
drifting away in the foam of the sea

*Ayva Lacoco*

## *Not Wanted*

I pretty much knew this would happen the whole time,  
but I didn't want to admit it.

I should've known when you didn't invite me  
to parties, when only a few of you wanted to hang out  
With me and actually get to know me as a person.  
when two of you cared when I ended up in the hospital,  
When I cried for days around Christmas and New Year's,  
when you told me that I wasn't welcome anymore.  
When you believed the rumors that were spread,  
didn't have the guts to tell me that I'm apparently  
A bitch to my face.

We're all told to be sisters, but is it sisterhood  
when all of you talk about what I did wrong  
While I'm not even in the room?  
I still share my secrets with a few of you,  
the ones who actually dare to make eye contact.  
I am The One Who Shall Not Be Named  
even though I was around for almost two years.  
I'm not allowed to be your friend if I don't  
have letters across my chest.

I drove you home at 2 am,  
lent you my shoulder to cry on,  
And spent countless hours that I will never  
get back. You told me that I'm selfish,  
That I'm aggressive for speaking up against rules  
that serve a few while making everyone else feel like shit.  
You discouraged me for writing essays instead of showing up  
at 10 o'clock on a school night, for reading novels and  
Creating lesson plans instead of wasting hours of my time  
On a random Wednesday night when I had an 8 am  
the next morning.

I never thought I would say goodbye,

hand away all of the shirts that were passed down,  
the artwork, and the Greek label that was attached  
To my name.

I never thought I would have the courage to speak  
up against the favoritism, the system that places some  
Women on a pedestal and makes other women bow down  
to them as if their fellow college students are queens.  
Go where you feel wanted, not where you are being  
ordered around by those who can skirt the rules.



## *Torn Tonight*

All people are capable of good  
We hold doors open, we call each other beautiful, we even share our  
drinks.  
All people are good.  
But you're different.  
Yeah, you hold the door for me and tell me I'm beautiful.  
You even bring me coffee every morning, even when I don't ask.  
But your heart is different.  
It's broken.  
You do all this for me  
Because no one has done it for you.  
You smile wide enough for me to see  
You laugh loud enough for me to hear  
That you're broken.  
So here we are on a Friday night, living under the strobing lights.  
We laugh and stumble about  
You carry me home and tuck me in  
And I know that you are so much more  
Than that big tear on your heart.

*Anonymous*

*Pink Clouds*

We chased the highs—  
they offered the best views.  
But the highs mean the furthest falls  
when the lows come for you.  
And they will come.

The highest high is in  
the pink clouds.  
When life lines up and hope  
rises from the horizon.

But the clouds are passersby—  
waving from the shoreline  
offering best wishes and smooth sailing.  
So set off alone  
into the fog

*Self Portrait**Kimberly Braet*



## *Deadly Friendship*

Someone once said that a person dies twice. The first time is when they stop breathing, and the second time is the last time someone says their name. If that's the case, we were almost positive that if Mallory had anything to do with it, Nayeli would live on forever. She probably preferred it that way, seeing as she always loved as much attention as she could muster from the townspeople of Newport. It was a small town, but we'd all grown up here, which was enough time to watch everything become old and unused together. It's funny how that happens in places where everyone knows each other.

Nayeli and her family moved to town when we were in fifth grade. They lived across the street from Mallory and her parents, right near the end of our cul-de-sac. And for as long as anyone could remember, the two had been inseparable. Except for the three months when Nayeli had tried to put moves on Mallory's brother, but that was beside the point. Nayeli had long, brown hair that was straight as a board with caramel colored skin, while Mallory had blonde curls, almost always pulled back in a tight ponytail that framed her porcelain skin. One was sweet and composed, while the other was outspoken and high strung. Complete counterparts, but so complimentary of one another. From girl scouts to cheerleaders, we watched the girls grow up together alongside the rest of our group, climbing out Mallory's window to sit on top of the rooftop every day, gossiping until late hours of the night.

Today, we walk the halls of Newport High School as upperclassman. Juniors and seniors on the brink of graduation, devastated by the loss of one beautiful girl. Day by day, playing out the mystery that is her death as the local authorities attempt to unmask what really happened on that Halloween night. We worried that if they didn't uncover the truth soon, Nayeli's death would be ruled as an accident, or worse, a suicide. But those of us who knew her couldn't bear the thought of either of these outcomes. No one could've possibly laid a hand on her. Not even herself.

It was the Saturday before Halloween, and everyone in Newport

knew that Mallory would be hosting one of her biggest parties of the year. The blonde was very well known for her parties, so much so that the residents of Newport – the parents and the authorities – would turn a blind eye for a select few nights of the year in hopes that knowing their kids would be confined to the McIntyre property rather than roaming around the outskirts of town would put them at ease. Until this year.

Everything started out as usual. Nearly all of Newport High's student body compiled into Mallory's backyard, playing beer pong and conversing over the bonfire while dressed in various costumes. The two hostesses floated around the party gregariously, flashing smiles at everyone as they flaunted their perfect attire. They'd spent months planning for this and we all knew it.

Sometime around midnight, Izzy Cooper wondered around the front of the house to find Mallory, standing over Nayeli's lifeless body, paralyzed in what she deemed to be fear. Izzy's scream brought forth the crowd from behind the house, as we all looked on in horror as the blood pooled around the brunette's long locks and onto the sidewalk.

"Mallory, did you see anything? Did you call 911?" Someone finally spoke, breaking the silence that even the cool, autumnal breeze had left us in those moments.

By the time she finally looked up, as if Mallory were about to end her wordlessness, the blaring of the ambulance broke into the air as the lights flashed, and it turned onto the street. From what we've heard, it took the police hours to get Mallory to talk, and even then, they couldn't get much out of her. The next morning, there were only two things the Newport Sheriff's department knew: Nayeli Bagent was dead and Mallory McIntyre was the primary suspect.

It wasn't until two days later, on that Tuesday, that we would see Mallory again. None of us expected it, so when she showed up to first period no one knew what to say. She looked like she hadn't slept since

the party, eyes caked with eyeliner that had obviously been there for days. She didn't go out of her way to speak to anyone, and everyone else reciprocated. After all, what does someone say to a girl who's just lost her best friend without seeming terribly cliché?

On Thursday afternoon, we all started to worry. Mallory was sort of the ring leader. She kept us all in sync with one another. Now everyone just shared side glances and hushed voices. Newport High had never felt so tranquil than in these hours. At lunch, Mallory and her boyfriend, Jeremy, sat together and shared very few words. This was the most status quo moment we'd seen thus far. That was until Jeremy asked to copy his girlfriend's biology notes, flipping open her notebook to the most recently used page.

"I don't have them!" Mallory shouted at him, ripping her notebook from his grip. Her anger startled all of us.

"I just saw them right there! What do you mean you don't have them?" Both of their voices were elevated at this point.

A few more unintelligible words were exchanged before Mallory stormed out of the cafeteria. Later, we found out that what Jeremy really saw inside her notebook was not biology notes at all. Scribbled inside the pages of Mallory's notes, she'd written something that changed her entire story: *I think I know who killed Nayeli.*

It seemed like since Nayeli, all the leaves had fallen in the entire town of Newport. It was fitting; the way that the lifelessness of the nature surrounding the town matched the lifelessness that we'd succumbed to with such a major disruption to our tiny town. Much like any other gossip, it didn't take long for whispers to start about what Jeremy had seen. It was like a game of telephone, and with time the story morphed into a monster of lies created by the mind of high schoolers. Our favorite version was that in which Nayeli was actually abducted by aliens who had killed her that Halloween.

But small-town gossip doesn't last long. On Monday morning, Newport's Deputy sheriff stood in the doorway of Mrs. McCoy's American History class, ushering Mallory out of the school and down to the station. This time, they were able to get a little more information out of her. She confessed that she thought that Nayeli had fallen from the rooftop of her house, a spot that had been sacred for the two of them, which was information that police had managed to gather themselves.

For the most part, Mallory stuck to her original statement, blaming alcohol for her lack of memory. Who could blame her? Underage drinking is a minuscule crime when compared to potential murder. With no new information, the local authorities began to expand their questioning. One by one, they interrogated all of Mallory's closest friends. A few of them came out to say that they hadn't seen Mallory with Nayeli for hours by the time everything was said and done that evening. A few even said that they'd seen Nayeli with Jeremy, looking for Mallory that night. Somehow no one could piece the night together quite yet.

For the next two weeks, things went back to normal. Days would go by, and it was like nothing ever happened, until Mallory would excuse herself from the room sniffing, leaving the room somber until her return, as if everyone was holding their breath while she was gone. Over this time, Mallory and Jeremy had decided to call their relationship quits. And for some who'd just lost their boyfriend and best friend, she seemed to be getting on well.

Her curls that had turned into matted nests and strands began to soften and returned to the perfect ponytail we all knew so well while her sweatpants turned back into jeans and skirts. She started talking more. Just small talk at first, mostly hi's and hello's, until finally she was back to the bubbly girl we'd all known and loved.

There were moments when we could all tell she felt a little bare without her sidekick, but she smiled and pushed through it. She even got back together with Jeremy, eventually. She began organizing a vigil for Nayeli to take place on her birthday, about a week from the day, and

about a month since the accident. The whole school was behind it as we came to Mallory's aid, helping with whatever she needed.

On the night of the memorial, we celebrated Nayeli's life in what was the best we could. We lit candles and shared our favorite stories of growing up together. Towards the end of the night, speeches were given, starting with Nayeli's mom, then the principal, and then Jeremy.

Mallory's was saved for last, of course, and we all expected it. While Jeremy finished up his words, Mallory's demeanor seemed to change from peaceful to nervous. She listened as her boyfriend talked about how beautiful and amazing her best friend was, and the memories of that night flooded back into her mind.

She took the stage, looking out into the crowd of people, obviously overwhelmed with emotions. She opened her mouth to speak, but stopped, looking down for an uncomfortably long pause before she finally spoke.

"Tonight, I intended to get up in front of you all, and tell you about how much I loved Nayeli and how much I miss her," she began, her eyes looking up from the podium. "I think instead I'll shed a little light onto what really happened that night at my party."

The crowd became restless in anticipation as she paused. We expected her to be more emotional. For someone who'd just lost their best friend, it seemed that she was oddly detached at this point. Much unlike the Mallory we'd seen for the past few weeks, constantly excusing herself in tears.

"That night, I had broken off from Nayeli for a bit to chat with someone about the upcoming bake sale, and when I was finished, no one had seen her. I didn't think anything of it, so I looked for Jeremy instead. Come to find out, no one had seen him either. Now, me being the lovely friend I am, didn't think anything of this, and decided to go up to my room

to freshen up. I opened the door to my room, and through the window I saw Nayeli and Jeremy. Together. On the roof. Next thing I know, maybe twenty minutes later, I find Nayeli was on the sidewalk.”

At this point, we were all looking at Jeremy, and his face was as white as a ghost. He had no clue what to say or do, so he just shook his head as if to tell us all that Mallory’s wrong. Mumbles began amongst the townspeople, and no sooner than we could make sense of everything Mallory said, Deputy Sheriff Martin was putting Jeremy in handcuffs before throwing him in the back of his police car.

And with that, we all felt a sense of peace. Nayeli’s death was no longer a mystery to us. Something had happened between the two of them that night that caused Jeremy to push Nayeli over the edge of the roof, even if we weren’t sure what that reason was. We went back to talk about Mallory in hushed tones, wondering if she felt silly for taking Jeremy back now that she’d realized that he must’ve killed her best friend. She didn’t seem to mind. That we talked about her, that is.

The next day, Jeremy showed back up at school, angrier than any of us had ever seen him. It turns out that the sheriff’s department didn’t have enough evidence to keep him in custody, so they just kept him as long as they could and turned him away in the morning. None of us were really sure if he’d done it or not. It didn’t seem like Jeremy had any real reason to push Nayeli of the roof, anger issues or otherwise.

He cornered Mallory in the hallway later that day before Izzy stepped in and pulled Mallory off to biology. Before she went, she apologized to him for telling everyone what sounded like him being the one who pushed Nayeli off the roof.

That day after school, word came from the sheriff that they’d finally caught the person who’d murdered Nayeli. Hopefully, this would be the end of it, we all thought. For Mallory’s sake, at least. Then, we found out that Mallory had gone to the station during sixth period and confessed.

Apparently, that night, when she saw Jeremy and Nayeli through her window, she overheard them talking about how they needed to stop sneaking around in secret. Mallory, upset at what she'd heard, backed out of the room and went to head downstairs. A few minutes later, she decided to go back up and confront them, when she passed Jeremy on the stairs, who claimed he'd been looking for both her and Nayeli for some time now. Mallory climbed the stairs to her room, and out the window onto the roof.

“Are you sleeping with Jeremy?” she accused Nayeli, her words slurred with her drunkenness and eyes burning with tears.

“Mal, it's much more complicated than that,” she replied, not able to meet the eyes of her friend.

In a fit of rage, Mallory pushed her friend. Nayeli lost her balance on the rooftop, and Mallory watched as she fell to the ground beneath her. It's said that when she went down to see if she was okay, she'd been in so much shock, she barely remembered what happened, and then Izzy was screaming. She never meant to hurt her.

This story was groundbreaking. The sheriff was so stunned that he even let Mallory go home for the evening so the town could collaborate on what to do next. The next morning, Newport's sheriff travel to the McIntyre residence to take her way. He found Mallory atop the roof. The same spot she and Nayeli had been on the night of the party

“Why don't you go ahead and come down now, Mallory?” the sheriff beckoned, never really a stern man to begin with.

Mallory stood up.

And jumped.

*Butts 4*

Damn, girl that's a nice ass.

That's a nice ass for a white girl.

Damn, white girl got ass.

Look at that perfect peach.

Damn, that girl got cake.

There's no way that ass belongs to a white girl.

Do these jeans make my butt look fat?

Yeah totally Phat, like the Phattest.

Damn, white girl got a Phat ass.

*Anonymous*



*A Big Bounce*

Like the universe,  
I'm expanding, thinning  
myself, reaching out into nothing.  
If I disperse wide enough  
I'll collapse back into the point,  
infinitely small and dense and hot,  
I came from  
when some swaying whim broke  
and will break again.  
I'll fly out, explode back into myself,  
search for the edge of anything,  
and everything everywhere  
scatters, and at once  
it's me, here.

*Hungry**Whitney Morris*

*Musings of a Modern Woman*

Am I a bad bitch?

Alexa, play that song again.

I wonder,

If I could peel the Earth

Like the skin of an orange

Into a delicate swirl,

then drink the Milky Way

And swallow the stars whole,

would I be enough?

Ask me again when

I'm not feeling

the sting of the hot pharmacist pining

after the mail order bride; too

Distracted to notice the acid somebody

Hid in my underwear drawer

turn into a goldfish,

then a teacup,

then back again.

If I were a stronger woman,

I would pluck the sun from the sky

And crack it in half with my fingers,

Letting the molten rock

rain down and baptize me.

Instead, I'm content to balance each half in my hands,

snapping its contents like bubble gum in my mouth

and tapping my feet to a hymn

only I can hear.

As I come down from my estrogen high,

I am crowned with a planet's rings.

If I set fire to a rosebush,

maybe then I would speak to God

And She would remind me

that I needed to orgasm regularly.  
And as the deep red petals fall  
into my mouth and turn to ash,  
I would be able to rest,  
knowing that I am, in fact,  
A bad bitch.

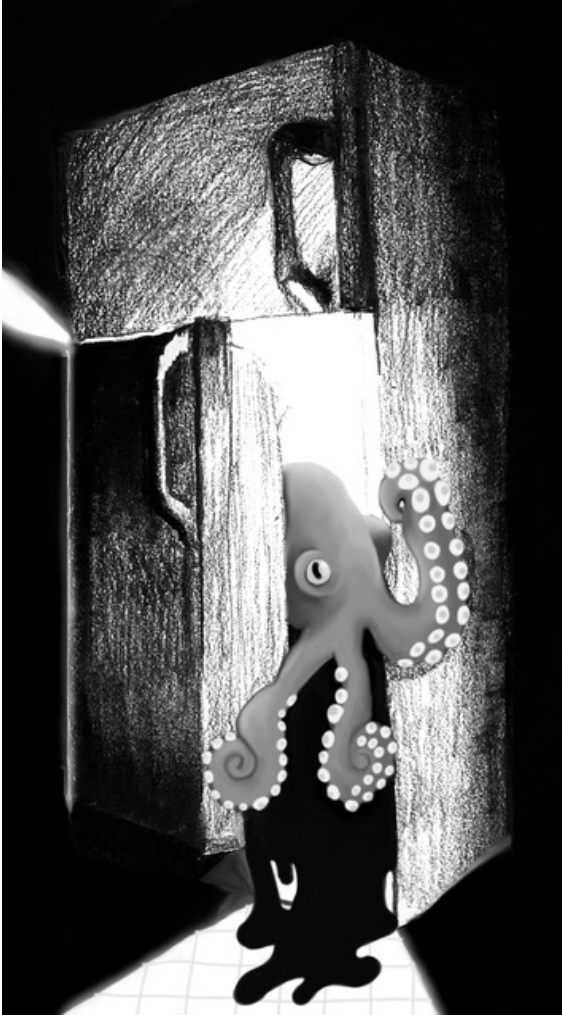
## *Blue Lampshades*

I'm going to town to meet someone special. I don't know who they are, but I've known them before. Longing for the day I reach out and the switch flips. I've got a lampshade of blue and it sings me some songs sweeter than the brisk fall sun. I've got a craving for a calling to drive me right off the road of intoxication, driving with two hands tied behind my back with a smile full of fangs, bloody with ambition. The ship keeps righting itself as I float on by, nothing but smooth sailing when the waters grow wild, rolling along with each burst of waves crashing and dipping. Got a box full of fun things, it's always a lock pick away from yours. Missing a leg to shake, missing the beat to which they all dance. I'm going to town to meet someone special, we might not see eye to eye, but there's always recognition. A twinkle in the night's skyline, shooting like the speed of a hand that learned the piano as a child, rekindling the fire they once circled around. Like a bullet passes through the skull I hope it takes one stare to find the words in which to speak, and the manner meant to say them. Carving my impression with the touch of a hand, the rattle of an empty skeletal structure, my stomach churns, and the buttons on my dash seem to swing limply. I hope the dizzy feeling of another time rushes on by, like the first time you hear your baby cry all the way until the can walk without your hand and then when you must hold theirs to keep up. I've got a blue lampshade that sings rain from the sky, and the clouds it sputters from follows those less fortunate than we. Just spin, spin, spin. The cycles of a washing machine crashing down a flight of stairs by a tree with initials that have been intimate for far longer than my memory can reckon. I'm going to town to meet someone special. Our faces might have changed, but the colors around ain't, a hue of violet will encircle her face like it did so many moons ago, I hope mine still shines a memorable picture-perfect purple in the streetlights of my old kitchen. A cold snowy night, in a field of sunflowers and roses that grow toe to toe, at a stoplight that always holds traffic to a stop, a single car with two passengers, at red. Their destination always unknown, but always where they may rest. I'm going to town to meet someone special, where bloodshot eyes are happy times and vulnerability is alluring, where tears are kept on an index finger of someone who cares, and where a memory is never too far from another. I've got a blue lampshade that sings pale melancholies to

sleep. I'm going to town to meet someone special, by a tree with initials that have been intimate for longer than my mind can remember.

*Nicolas Kemmerer*

*An Unusual Infestation*



*Alyssa Green*

## *A Letter to my Brain*

Dear Brain,

I know I haven't been the greatest to you. I've neglected you. I don't eat the right foods or drink water enough. My sleeping habits are poor at best and unpredictable at worst. I swing wildly between under stimulating you or overwhelming you. Yet, let's both be honest here- you haven't been the greatest to me either.

You're sick. I get that, we all get sick, but my sick days are occasional. You, on the other hand, are sick all the time. Seriously? You need to get your shit together. For me. For us.

I want to live. I honest to Gods, want to live a full and happy life. What's standing in the way of that? You. I must keep badgering you, no I don't want to die at every little inconvenience. That's you, or the sickness, or you, or... I can't tell anymore. Either way, get it straight. I don't want to hurt myself anymore. I don't want to hurt those I love anymore. Why make me? Because you're hollow? Selfish? Just plain mean?

Why are you mean to me so much? Every other organ in my body operates the way it should. My lungs pump air and my heart pumps blood.

My cells are all working so hard on a microscopic level for the sake of a functioning organism known as me. Why can't you pull your weight?

Look, I appreciate you. I do. You help me walk, and talk, and feel. But this whole feeling thing, at least the way you operate it, is a little jacked up. I don't need to always feel in extremes, or feel dull, or hollow, or like a void. It's okay to feel emotions, just not in the wild way you do. The pain is good for my art, but the suffering is destroying my life.

I know you're trying, and I am too. I just need you to try a little harder.

Best regards,  
Me

*April Petesch*



## *Monsters*

As a child,  
I had monsters  
Just as most kids do.

Except,  
They didn't hide in closets  
or underneath my bed.

Instead,  
They slept down the hall,  
In a room I dare not run to.

Naturally or by magic,  
Monsters leave when there's light,  
Disguised as strangely hung clothes  
or as toys stuffed oddly in corners.

My monsters,  
Weren't scared of the light.  
In fact,  
They flourished during the day.  
Seeing them all the time,  
I had to give them names.

Sometimes I relied on them.  
Called them to my aid.  
Crying out for mom or dad,  
to come and save the day.

Rarely did that happen though.  
I learned quite early on,  
To never call upon a monster,  
Not at any cost.

However,

Monsters can't stay monsters.  
Children must grow up.  
Told monsters don't exist.  
Taught they're imagination.

Kids grow up.  
Night lights disappear.  
Knowing,  
That dark pile is actually a chair.

What happens,  
When the monsters don't go away?  
When you're told they don't exist?  
What do you do when no one will listen?  
When no one believes they're there?

You start to believe your peers are right.  
Convincing yourself its all made up.  
Losing trust of what you feel.  
Never knowing fake from real.

The monsters' lies become your truth  
Your truth becomes the lie.

I wish my monsters were like most  
and stayed beneath my bed.

*Mariah, of Wind and Sea*

Heart in your chest-  
Treasure I need,  
Heaving and sighing  
My waves rock you to sleep.

Spend eternity in me,  
Little ship,  
Fill your sails,  
I will be your sea.

Spend eternity in me,  
Little ship,  
Moored in the deep,  
With sunny skies  
And misty dreams.

Be my light,  
You have me.  
You have me.

*Lavendar**Noelle Ziegler*

## *Spring Cleaning*

I lost the memory  
In the couch cushions.  
After months of  
Much needed cleaning  
I take the vacuum out and  
Use the hose to  
Suck up the dirt, dust bunnies,  
Stale crumbs,  
Lost pennies,  
And popcorn kernels.  
Suddenly the vacuum growls  
I shut it down  
Looks like I sucked up  
Something it couldn't handle.  
Something I couldn't handle.  
There it was,  
The memory of us,  
Sticky and grubby.  
There's not enough Febreze  
To cover the foul stench  
My stomach churns,  
I hold my breath,  
And throw it into the trash.  
My mother asks me what  
Smells so bad,  
I say,  
"Something rotten."

## *Smorgasbord*

Generation of addicts. Smorgasbord of addictions.  
 Born an alcoholic. Four years old  
 Scrambling up the kitchen counter  
 swigs of Vanilla extract.  
 No clue, liked how it made me feel.

Tasted my first beer. Same effect.  
 Had a love affair with liquor until I was  
 Double crossed.  
 Could not get enough, never enough.

Went down dark alleys not knowing if  
 Daylight would arise. Saying prayers to  
 Stay alive.  
 Will stop after this one.

After this one, After this one, After this one.  
 Until my body screamed, no more no more  
 I lost my sanity  
 Talked nonsense

Seen the light, staggered away

I am an alcoholic, born an alcoholic  
 Put down the drink  
 Other addictions pop up  
 Some are old pals, others unwelcome guests.  
 It is a smorgasbord of addictions

## *Top 5 Things to do While the Lobster is Screaming in the Pot*

Lobster is a delicious seafood that people all over the world enjoy. However, those who home-cook their lobsters may find it disturbing when they drop the live animal in a pot of boiling water only to hear it clattering around in an attempt to escape the pot while the steam escaping from between the flesh and the shell makes a whistling noise very much like desperate screaming. The secret to coping with this is not to ignore the screams, as many have tried and failed to do, but to embrace them. Here are our top 5 ways to accept the scream of the lobster and rejoice in your future fresh seafood meal.

1. **Scream with the lobster.** We all know it's not actually the lobster screaming, but rather the steam escaping from between the meat and the carapace. Nevertheless, the lobster's frantic scrabbling sure makes it seem like the lobster would scream if it could. Join in! Accept your inevitable mortality as one.
2. **Play a flute, recorder, or other wind-based instrument with the scream.** Who said despair can't be musical? Much great art comes from a dark place of hopelessness after all. The scream of the lobster, combined with the clanging of its claws against the walls of the pot, are almost like a musical symphony when it comes down to it. They are like the first caveman to discover rhythm and song, demanding the meaning of life from a deaf sky.
3. **Record the lobster.** You're using the lobster's boiled body for your food, so why not record its screams and frantic scrabbling for later listening pleasure? Imagine what a nice wind-chime sound you could remix out of this. You might even be able to turn it into a good ringtone for your alarm.
4. **Sit in silence.** A common reaction to the "screaming" lobster is to set a timer and leave the kitchen. Chefs who do this are cowards and fools. To think the lobster's pain ceases simply because there is no one there to observe it is a comical display of ignorance. Instead, grab a stool and perch yourself next to the pot of boiling water. Imagine yourself as the lobster.

5. Think about how good the lobster is going to taste. This may seem like avoidance at first, but don't be fooled. The lobster is giving up its life for you. You are boiling the lobster alive not for any greater good, but because it tastes nice. Remember that as the scream fills your kitchen. In several short minutes, that pain will be on your plate, and it will taste delicious.



*Just Desserts*

To cake a problem  
you must first tart the issue  
then calmly snicker doodle  
until you can pound cake  
now meringue  
and maybe butterscotch  
just to be sure  
that everyone is apple pie  
about the whole thing,  
and it never hurts  
to chocolate mousse  
about it a little more  
but this is only one option  
in a saltwater taffy  
of others,  
and not every problem  
has a cake.

*Flawed Fruit*

Do not touch me,  
I'm fragile.  
I have been dropped  
          time  
          and  
          time  
          again.

Cold consequences  
for letting the wrong hands  
handle my delicate  
legacy.

My skin remains  
bruised  
from past lovers,  
each piercing me  
with a hearty bite  
to my ego.

They took advantage  
of my lust  
for love  
and desire  
for purpose.

More bruises  
than bushels,  
less love  
than lives.

No one wants  
a flawed  
fruit.

## *All's Well That Ends Well*

She was a young girl, too young to experience such a thing in a courtroom in mid-December. Although her face showed youth, the white hairs sparkling from her root told otherwise of what she had been through. She spent a lot of time in the courtrooms that reeked of old books and her own tears. She often retreated to her home, a reflection of herself, where her anxiety could be hung up with her coat and left at the door. Her walls were decorated in frames of happy children that hid the holes behind them, with slight darkness peaking at the corners. She softly draped her fragile soul onto the couch and laid awake, staring at the ceiling. Her phone rang, an unknown phone number.

Her anxiety sprang from the coat rack and embraced her like an old friend would. The voice on the other side of the line spoke in whispers that could shoot darts into her heart from over the electronic waves.

“Hello, is this Mrs. Alexander?”

“Well, yes. But please call me Ms. Morrow.”

“My apologies, miss. I am the defense attorney appointed to the Jason Alexander v. The Commonwealth of New Hampshire, how are you doing today?”

“I am doing fine. Why are you calling?” she brushes her hair to be placed behind her ear, exposing the scars he left.

“Jason Alexander is now in custody, located at the Manchester Prison. Would you like him to have access to your information for contacting purposes?”

“Are you kidding? Why would I? He already knows my address, does he need anything more?”

“I guess not, it is just customary for me to ask, I apologize ma'am.”

“How long?”

“How- oh yes. 10 years, shorter with good behavior.”

She hangs up the phone.

She felt the cinder blocks that pressed on her shoulders vanish as she rose from her couch. She sprang with such excitement, that she ran outside of her house. It was a cold December day, snow nestled on the frozen ground. Everything covered but her clean sidewalk she slaved over the day before. She threw her hands in the air fleetingly, with her coat still in place on the rack. She took a deep inhale, and let it go with a cloud that lifted into the blue sky above. She felt as free as she ever felt, and safe as she ever would be. The cold air embraced her but the adrenaline kept her as warm as the furnace in her fists. She thought to herself now, that this would be her life. She could let him go, move on, and embrace the life she has been given. Life had given her a second chance. She thought of all that she could accomplish now that the threat of him has been pressed into the defined corners of concrete and bars. She reached for the sky, and realized she could go back to school. She could write again, and embrace all that she loved. She could move to a town where no one knows her name. All these ideas flooding her mind brought to her new light and new hope, now that she is free.

But then a car raced around her corner, a small white ford focus with illegally tinted windows. The passenger leaned out of the window, in perfect firing range. The woman with her arms in the air, as free and as safe as she has ever felt, found red growing from her chest as the car drove by and a deafening shot echoed the once quiet neighborhood. She fell, defeated, on her no longer cleaned sidewalk, as her hard work was covered now in crimson red as it poured. It was his brother, the one who seeks revenge, who leaned out of the passenger seat of the car and fired at her. But now, she is truly free, as she lay on the cold sidewalk drenched in red alone.

*Kaitlyn Johnson*

*Grinding*

You are my first thought at the crack of dawn.  
The reason why I get out of bed with a grin.  
I crave your heat, your taste, the rush you give me.  
I want to be filled to the brink by you,  
Your warmth coating my insides as I sigh in bliss.  
I need my lips to gently glide against yours  
While you overwhelm my tongue with your bite.  
Help me understand why  
Others do not love you as much as I do.  
They call you bitter. Sharp. But very hot.  
A morning owl, always there to perk me up.  
Without you, I cannot go on.  
You complete me, my precious cup of coffee.

*Kady Keck*

## *I Dream a World Pt 2.: Dr King Would be Dissapointed*

I dream a world where imagination roams free,  
Where kids play happily on city blocks,  
And people open their doors to everyone that knocks.

I dream of a world where hope & faith rest in our hearts,  
And wretchedness, harm, or despair always do us part.  
A world where people saw someone's character before their skin  
Where what mattered was within and not based on one's preference of religion

Where beauty had a broad definition  
And no individual influenced others to fit into their narrow definition of it

Where money and greed were not synonyms used constantly  
And unique names were pronounced correctly

Where fear did not cripple believers and dreamers  
And faith was used as wings

Each individual striving for their sole purpose  
Meeting success without meeting jealousy as well

Where great included all  
Not limited to one man's decision  
Where great incorporated all the visions of the ones living who strived  
for greatness creating a broad definition of it

When kids remember there's more to life than technology & T.V.,  
And children again begin to pick up books to read.

The world a picture framed of things to be,  
Not a mixture of things, we don't wish to see.

I dream of a world where ghetto, ugly, slut, and curse words don't exist,

And when someone offers you drugs or a cigarette you are able to resist.

A world where happiness and harmony exist too,  
Where sorrow and tragedy just won't do.

Our journey a mountain not mattering how fast we get there,  
Or what's waiting for us on the other side,  
Our journey depends on the climb.

Yes it sounds cliché  
But this term has never been overused  
I assure you

I dream of a world where when someone asked you what violence is,  
You wouldn't have a clue.  
And instead of wasting time walking to greatness,  
we picked the race and flew.

Uniting ourselves with hot glue,  
Checking for worn out shoes that need to be mended for the journey  
anew.  
Impatiently we wait for the exquisite view,  
Getting ready to go, waiting for our cue.

And at the end of our journey,  
We'll tell the story,  
Of how we threw away our extra weight,  
And how our paths changed from narrow and curved,  
To nice and straight.

And our trials an interesting book to tell,  
Chapters and chapters of how we climbed the hills and fell,  
And got back up again,

Because of this glorious day we wished to attend.

Not knowing the address, we got to our destination,  
Eyes glistening in the process,  
Our creation a new generation.

Finally we pushed past the doors of death to the future,  
Now our trials and tribulations fewer.

This world we can get to if we try,  
But we must first learn to push our worry and struggle aside.

We must learn to change from within,  
Shrinking our struggles in a bin,  
Listen to our kin,  
Only then will our lives spin,  
And we will be able to win,  
This voyage.

These things might be hard to do,  
But changing this world starts with you

And when you realize these things are not as hard as they seem,  
Then my friends this is the world I dream.

Our differences are what make us unique  
Believing that we are all equal is what unites us  
Because there is unity in diversity



*cerEYebellum*



*Anna Jedrejczyk*

## *Daydream*

I had a dream last night,  
Hand gripping the back of your neck,  
Fingertips imprinting themselves in your skin,  
You drove what felt like a million miles per hour.  
Into the auburn orange sunset,  
streaked with cotton candy pink clouds,  
that flowed and followed us in uniform.  
No real destination, just the excitement of leaving.  
We didn't look back,  
Except to wave goodbye to what we once thought was important.  
Swaying under a yellow crescent moon  
You told me you thought you loved me.  
I think I love you too.  
That was my dream last night.

*Carly Ritz*

*Life on Earth: A Cautionary Tale*

Before it all started  
We had nothing  
No phones to satisfy our boredom  
No Twitter  
No Instagram  
No Snapchat  
No Facebook  
No YouTube  
Social media was nonexistent  
Just peaceful rivers  
The sound of trickling water  
Moss growing on tree bark  
Rocks randomly scattered upon the woodland floor  
Plants of all kinds  
Growing  
Breathing  
Living  
Bathing in the sunlight  
Filled with serenity and bliss  
The trees stood waving in the wind  
The air swells with wonder and hope  
No distractions  
All of it now used as a backdrop  
Posted to Instagram for likes  
Likes that fill your ego with joy  
Everyone is obsessed with numbers  
Number of followers  
Number of posts  
Number of hearts  
All social media is connected  
Like spiderwebs in the world  
Catching little bugs as prey  
Entrapping their victims until death  
The devices we hold  
Have overtaken the tranquility of nature

Destroyed it  
Always in our hands  
Never without something to do  
Earbuds in  
Music blasting  
Scrolling with our thumbs  
Playing games  
Watching Netflix  
Ignoring the beautiful world surrounding us  
Human contact is slowly being erased  
The digital world is our focus  
Nothing else  
Every day our foundations are being forgotten  
The ground beneath our feet being overlooked  
Once cherished and prayed upon by the pure  
Now neglected and filled with trash  
The garbage that roams the streets will end in Earth's demise  
Suffocating its creatures with plastic  
Covering its land with wrappers  
Filling its water with sewage  
Polluting the atmosphere with fossil fuels  
Fossil fuels that are depleting  
Year by year  
Month by month  
Day by day  
The wind and water  
Once our friends  
Now transportation for litter  
Vessels leading to extinction  
Many people seem to forget  
We need Earth, but Earth doesn't need us  
We steal mother nature's resources for our own evolution  
She questions us every day  
Why would you abuse me after I've given you these fruits of nature?  
How much longer can I hold on?

The answers rely on our actions  
By taking steps towards the future  
A cleaner  
Healthier  
Safer future

## *Christmas Star*

Twinkling lights surround the frozen pond, the nearby trees glitter with snow and ornaments. The colored lights spread the joy of the season through the air, as they reflect off the snow and ice. The little cabin nearby radiates warmth, a decorated Christmas tree can be seen in the window, with a fire crackling in the fireplace next to it. Away from the city the stars shine in the night as bright as the lights around the trees.

On this beautiful night a young woman sits on a bench with her date outside of the cabin. She pulls the laces tighter on her skates, hands shaking, trying to make sure she won't fall out of them. He chuckles and grabs her hands helping her up off the bench. She grips onto his hands and tries to balance on the blades as he guides her over to the frozen pond. She pulls her scarf tighter around her neck before taking the first step onto the ice. Her skates slide around on the ice and her ankles wobble as she tries to gain her balance.

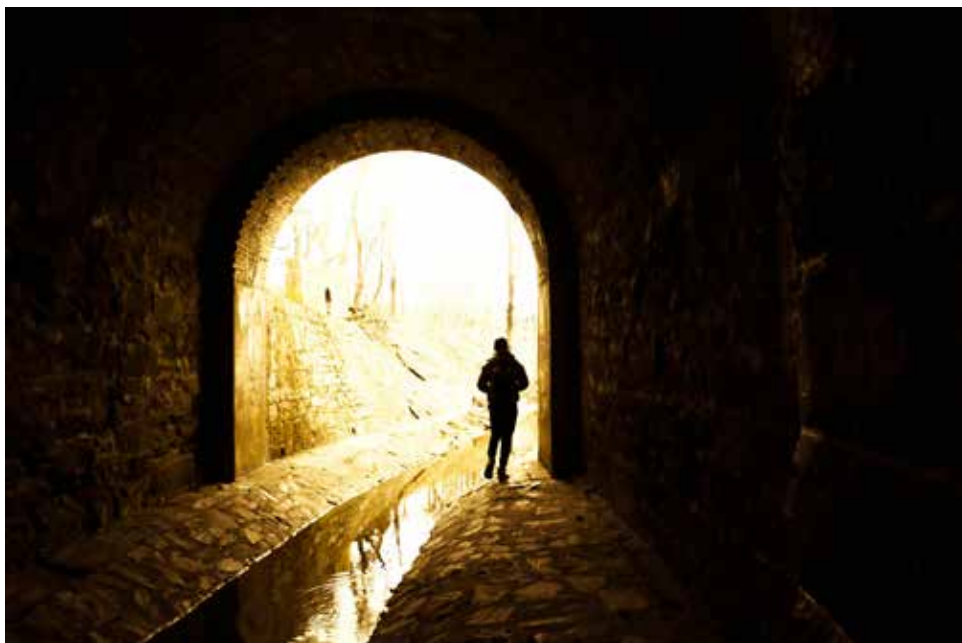
The smile on his face grows as he sees her staring down at the skates where they connect with the ice. He gently pushes himself backwards pulling her along with him. She nervously laughs as she starts to get the hang of it.

The surface of the pond was not very smooth, since nature was the one to maintain it. The couple glides along until her skate catches on a tiny imperfection. She falls forward into him and he falls back onto the ice. Once they stop sliding across the ice, the couple starts laughing.

She rolls onto the ice next to him, taking a moment to look at all the stars. Out here, they could see thousands of them. "Make a wish," she whispers and points up to the sky, motioning towards a shooting star.

Why make a wish, when I wouldn't change a thing?

*New Beginnings*



*Ryan Krueger*

## *Slow Dance in the Forest*

We are the hidden creatures that  
when the music of the forest begins  
to vocalize our dance begins.

Fleet footed as deer so gracefully  
do we roam by the moonlit trail?  
No, we can only imagine each other  
as night elves with shimmering  
silvery-blue skin.

I can't help but stare at you  
the woman who has my,  
heart, soul, my everything.  
In my head I hear Denver  
sing his classic Annie's Song.  
Because the way you trigger  
my senses are nothing short of  
an 18-karat diamond.

My heart can't help but  
feel an abundance of grace.  
Looking into your face  
and the feel of your skin.  
Immortal is what I want  
this night to become.

The tears of the sky become  
our bedroom as we share  
this slow dance in the forest.

*Nicole Potts*



*Be with Someone*

be with someone who loves you  
wildly and unconditionally  
both behind closed doors  
and in front of the whole damn world

be with someone who loves you  
for the reasons you do and the reasons you don't  
for every single flaw you pick out  
and every single trait you flaunt

be with someone who loves you  
during your darkest moments  
let them be your moon on your darkest nights  
and your sun on your brightest days  
and every little moment in between

be with someone who loves you  
like it's all that they know  
and who treasures you  
like it's the last breath they'll take

you deserve that kind of happiness

# *Toe Beans*



*Bailey Milnik*

## *Society*

Do you feel sad, depressed, full of anxiety or panic?

Take this pill, it'll make you feel better.

Do you feel at a loss for words, or lack focus?

Take this pill, it'll make you feel better.

Do you feel like your world looks wrong or twisted?

Take this pill, it'll make you feel better.

Sides Effects may include:

Worsening depression,

Suicidal thoughts,

Blurry vision,

Dizziness,

Drowsiness or fatigue,

Dry mouth,

Feeling agitated or restless,

Gaining weight,

Headaches,

Nausea,

Sexual problems or erectile dysfunction,

Sleep problems,

Upset stomach,

Constipation,

Increased Blood Pressure,

Loss of appetite,

And sweating more than usual.

After all, remember what they say,

Take this pill, it'll make you feel better, right?

## *Solitary*

It can be trickery or ignorance  
Reasonable or not  
In good faith  
Or wishes to do harm  
It always ends up falling apart regardless

So, what do I do?  
Just wait until everyone leaves  
Lock the door  
And feign the love that I've been searching for  
While on the other side of my wall, a friend already found it for himself?

It's always worse when you save a friend  
They escape their solitary  
They find their savior, their partner  
All because you brought them together  
And yet you keep getting hurt

It's becomes a Caesarean stabbing  
An unknowing and unintentional betrayal  
How can he be so joyous  
While I'm alone  
All while putting in ten times the effort he did?

They all claim that I'll find someone  
That there will be one that breaks this monotonous routine  
That one day I won't be fucked over  
That one day I will be able to escape this pattern  
That one day I'll be happy like all of them

*Finding & Flourishing*



*Whitney Morris*

## *Family Reunion*

There is restlessness on the land that sleeps. Families from all over the pueblo of Cuxpala gather at the cemetery carrying candles for Dia de los Muertos, illuminating these restful grounds. Inside these inner gates is a city of shrines decorated in colorful paper cut outs and flowers. On every shrine you can see a cross, photos of people, and statues of the Virgin Mary. This city that is always quiet is now singing prayers and songs.

Mamá Juanita, holding a basket, leaves a trail of orange magnolia petals from her house to the Heavens as she walks up to the cemetery. Little Benito follows her with his face decorated as a candy skull. His eyes wander around but occasionally his hand checks on the item that he's holding inside his sweatshirt pocket. Little Benito can hear the church bells signaling that it's evening. He looks over to the sun set seeing the orange sky slowly consumed by space.

They arrive at the cemetery and head to a shrine that has a picture of an old woman wearing a flowing white dress. Mamá Juanita pulls out a blanket and lays it on the woman's tomb. "Good to see you again Esli. I found the cobija we made together when Mamá thought it was time for us to know how to knit when we were kids. This should keep you warm for another year." She places a candle and lights it. "Good to see you again, hermana."

They move to the next shrine that has a picture of an old man wearing a sombrero with boots, plaid shirt, and jeans. Mamá Juanita pulls out an unopened glass bottle of Coke and pops the cap off, then looks at his photo. "It's your favorite." She chuckles and says, "I was right, Tio Oscar! I knew you were gonna go out before I did." She pauses. "But... at least it wasn't from the toros, so I'll give you that." She raises the bottle. "Salud". She takes a sip from the bottle and hands it to Little Benito. He takes a sip then places the half empty bottle on Tio Oscar's tomb. She places a candle and lights it. "Good to see you again, Tio."

Lastly, they arrive at a shrine that has a picture of a man in the middle front of a group of people including Mamá Juanita and Little Benito.

Mamá Juanita pauses for a moment. Little Benito tugs her traditional floral dress. “Mamá Juanita...”

Mamá Juanita snaps back to reality. “Oh. Sorry Benito. Go ahead and give Papá Ricardo what you brought.”

Little Benito reaches into his sweatshirt pocket and pulls out a harmonica that he got from Papá two months ago. He places it on Papá’s tomb and looks at his photo. “I’ve been practicing like you told me, Papá Ricardo, but I accidently broke it. I’m sorry.”

Mamá Juanita pats Little Benito’s head and pulls out a candle. “I’m sorry amor, there isn’t much to talk about.” She smiles sincerely and then lights the candle. “It’s good to see you again so soon.” Little Benito notices a small case laying on the ground. He picks it up and finds a brand-new harmonica. Looking around, Little Benito tries to figure out where it came from, but ends up being drawn to Papá Ricardo’s photo. He then slowly places the harmonica in his pocket while continuing to look at the photo. Mamá Juanita sets the lit candle down and, in that moment, the stars began to glow.

## *Two Gods Playing Chess*

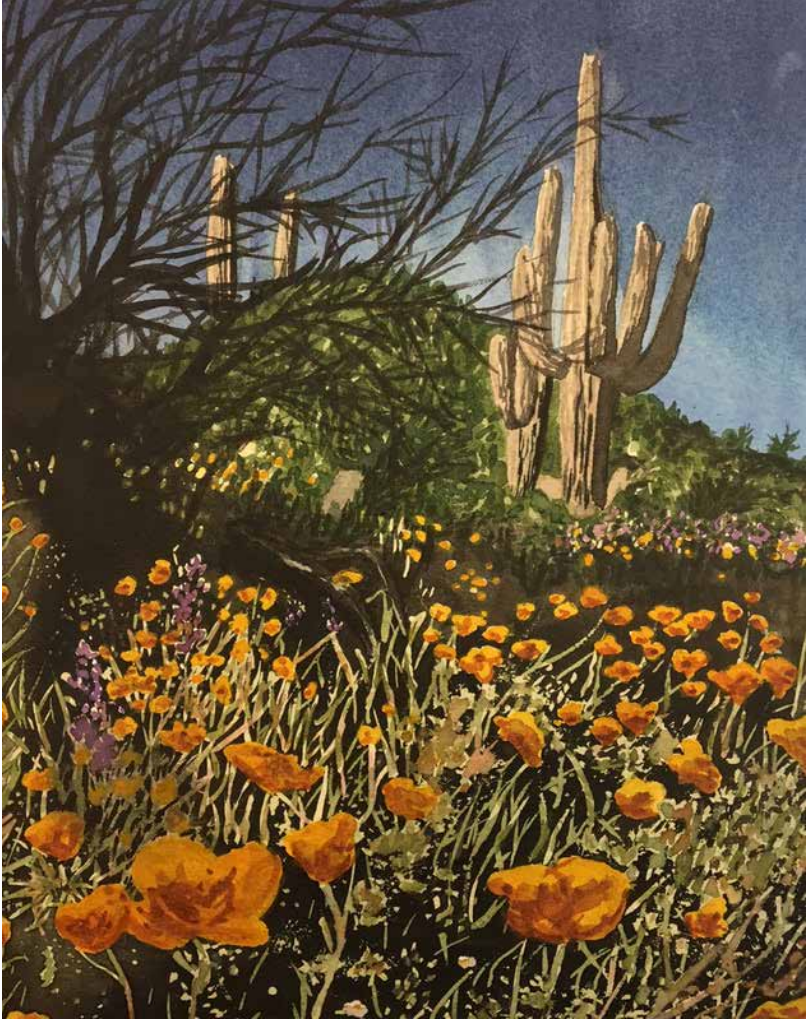
Two Gods were, are, and will be  
Playing a game of chess.  
Both omnipotent.  
Both omniscient.  
Both all encompassing.  
The beginning, the middle,  
And the end of all.  
Both gods already know the outcome  
Of the game.  
They know the winner.  
Yet they have both devised  
Flawless strategies  
For winning the game  
And likewise know each other's strategies  
Before they have even been devised.  
They have, are, and forever will  
Be adapting their strategy based on their  
Vast knowledge of each other,  
Themselves, and the grand scheme of  
Eternity which they both understand.  
Their paradoxical match can never end.  
And will likewise never begin.  
Even though they can see the beginning  
And know the end.  
It is a match of Godly patience  
Where knowledge is shown  
Through lack of motion.  
A stillness that mocks the hurried  
Thoughts of the world's greatest minds.  
The chess match of eternity.



*Survivor*

i never thought it would happen to me.  
it was something that i just heard in the news  
i always said "it won't be me"  
that night you took a part of me  
and you crushed it with your hands as your fingers wrapped around my  
throat  
i said i would always be careful  
but i let my guard down  
i thought i was safe  
but i guess i was wrong  
i cry and wonder why  
why would you do what you did?  
is it something i said? was it something i did?  
why me?  
you left me broken and hurt  
bleeding and bruised  
i hate the way you made me feel  
disgusted in my own skin  
you did this to me  
you destroyed a part of my soul  
crushed it into fine pieces and blew it into the wind  
it is an icy pain that chills me to my bones  
making my stomach quake  
nights im awaken with fear  
praying and wishing my mother were here  
but i take a deep breath and realize  
i am more than just my tears  
i am worth more than what you did  
i am a woman who is overcoming  
someone who isn't afraid to share her story  
in hopes that one maybe  
nobody will have to feel the same pain

*Arizona*



*Kaitlyn Durf*

*The Two Faced Poem*

One side,  
Opens the rusted, tin can.  
Letting loose memories,  
You tried desperately to repress.  
Continuously throttling your neck,  
Till all justifications been expelled.  
Slowly,  
You begin to crumble.  
The powerhouse  
That kept your poison from leaking,  
Shatters, and drains down through your ribcage.

One side,  
Stands hopelessly behind bars of gray.  
Guarded by demons that vary in strengths,  
Yet, dominate you constantly in battle.  
Abused daily without hesitation,  
But  
Never once been labeled expendable.  
Repeatedly piecing together your identity,  
After fierce scrubbing from the identity unnamed.  
Dreaming to one day sit upon the tainted throne,  
Cleansing the kingdom you've used to rule.  
One side.  
Can't decide.

*Durmlavores*

They haunt me in the midnight  
Watching from the street  
They sneak in like marauders  
They surface from the deep

Their faces grim and hollow  
Red eyes dark with weep  
They hunger for my sanity  
They gnaw upon my sleep

They're missing something from me  
Scouring my skull for more  
They delve into my groggy eyes  
And open every door

But now, they can't escape the flood  
Waves crash to the floor  
Their tiny shadow bodies crack  
Those fragile durmiavores

They've broken through the concrete wall  
They're rattled to their cores  
They've set a flood upon the town  
They can't feed anymore

*Bright Feathers*



*Abigail Lee*

## *Scientific Method*

### **Identify the Problem**

You never know when your heart will stop for the first time. It could be in your death, during an orgasm, a near death experience, or something wholly unexpected. Something truly shocking.

It started off innocent enough, another day in a new school filled with people I didn't know- and didn't care enough to get to know. The science class material was boring and dragged on and on. I tried my hardest not to fall asleep, so I divided my time between doodling in my notebook and observing my peers.

Then- all the sudden- in a large gust of bravado and blinding infatuation I caught my first glimpse of her radiant smile. She was absolutely stunning with flowing locks and eyes full of depth. Everything else in the room stopped and stood still as I stared at her. She stopped what she was doing, looked in my direction. I quickly and, quite frankly, awkwardly dodged her gaze.

My problem? I have a mad crush on this adorable girl in my science class.

My problem? I don't stand a chance...

Or do I?

### **Background Research**

Her favorite and most often worn color is red. It matches her fiery energy and bubbly personality. She's a bursting firecracker, always laughing, always joking, and always smiling. She always writes in colorful pens. It suits her because she adds color to my world like a rainbow. Her zodiac sign is a Sagittarius. Once again, up-keeping the fiery energy she displays from the core of her being. She loves all types of music from rock to rap. I don't like half the stuff she listens to, but I always enjoy watching her head bob to the beat. It's a cute quirk of hers. She likes doodling, but her skills are limited to stick figures and flowers. It's adorable.

She's cute. Like super cute.

Yet, the real research question begs to remain answered.

Does she like girls? Has she ever imagined what a woman's soft touch felt like? Has she imagined it, or perhaps how soft another's lips would be? Has she ever daydreamed giving soft butterfly kisses across a woman's collar bone, filling the cracks between the bones with tender love and touch?

To put it unpoetically, is she gay like me?

Even just a little bit? Is there any hope she'll ever love me?

### **Hypothesis**

She loves me. (Please, oh please, oh please)

### **Experiment**

The experiment itself was messy. Not messy like the dirt underneath fingernails, or dog turds on the porch type of way. Those were obvious sorts of messy.

This was a different type of messy. The kind of messy that had my stomach tied in knots. Not in a digesting sort of way, but slowly devouring itself into the pit of my organs. It was slowly throbbing, sinking its dull teeth into my chest. My chest pounding and sweating at odd hours of the night. It was gnawing at me from the inside.

Messy in a sore, thought consuming I-Can't-Think-About-Anything-Except-Her sort of way.

The experiment itself started off lightly in a few rounds of subtle techniques. The soft poetic flirting.

It started off with a few light compliments, "Hey, I really like your hair. It

looks gorgeous on you.”

See? Nothing explicitly gay about that. Just testing the waters.

She laughed kindly and expressed gratitude. She returned the favor by saying she liked my freckles.

Does this mean she thinks I’m attractive? Only time can tell.

Weeks passed and we exchanged conversation. Deep conversation.

She told me about her life and I told her about mine. She told me her dreams of becoming a nomad hippie, traveling the world and doing unusual but rewarding jobs. Jobs like joining the circus or being a fortune teller. She expressed her interest in always wanting to backpack in Europe. She loved adventure, the outdoors, and experimenting with new hobbies. She discussed her personal life and how her mom and her always fought. She said her dad was distant and was never really that engaged. She told me of her traumatic break up with her ex-boyfriend.

Aw, shit, is she straight? I crashed inside at first.

Then she continued and said she was done with men and their hurtful ways.

Does this mean I have a chance to swoop in and sweep her off her feet? Weeks then passed without much development.

We went hiking one day. It was on the Appalachian trail, on top of the mountains in the crisp autumn air. The leaves were hues of orange, red, and gold. The wind carried them as they danced gracefully all around us. When we reached the utmost top of the mountain, we watched the sunset together.

She gazed full of wonder over our home valley. “God, it’s absolutely



beautiful up here.”

Without thinking I whispered, “I think you’re more beautiful.”

Oh, shit was my first thought when I let it slip. Yet, when I looked at her while I was blushing, she was blushing too.

We didn’t say anything the rest of the hike. We didn’t need to.

Months passed without us speaking of the incident. Then the experiment got really crazy.

She looked at me mischievously from behind the neck of the wine bottle. We were in her basement while her parents were both at work. Hence, we broke out the big guns and brought out her parent’s alcohol stash. She sloshed the liquid’s contents around while looking at me dazedly. This was our third bottle of wine, so we were definitely screwed by the time her parents came home. She said not to worry about it because she knows how to cover it up, that her parents were almost never down in the basement. I don’t know if it was her sweet voice that lulled me into a sense of security or the cheap wine’s liquid courage, but I wasn’t worried at all. I was enjoying the moment being with her.

“Have you ever kissed a girl?” She asked sultry.

At least, I think it was supposed to be sultry. Alcohol clung to her breathe as she crawled towards me in what I think was supposed to be sexy. In hindsight, her attempts at being sexy were silly but I too, was feeling just as lost in the sea of drunken judgment.

“N-no” I stammered out, a harsh mixture of the alcohol’s haziness and my natural nerves creeping out.

It was true- I’ve never kissed a girl. I’ve only ever been dreaming about kissing her. I was a virgin in the truest sense of the word.

She leaned forward and it was pure bliss when our lips touched. I stroked her head closer, petting her hair as our kiss got more passionate.

The rest? Don't get too nosy. Even if I wanted to document it, I couldn't.

The rest is a blur.

### **Data**

The thoughts plague the next day. They continue to tumble inside of me like a hurricane. I'm analyzing every interaction we've ever had- especially of the events the night before. I woke up in my own bed, away from the basement and that tender kiss. Away from her.

Did that kiss mean as much to her as it did to me? It meant the world to me.

The data points that she feels the same as me, but only time can say for sure. Tomorrow I'll find out.

### **Conclusion**

Tomorrow came and I wished it didn't.

I saw her kissing a boy from our science class in the bathroom. Her tongue was tangled with his; her hands in his hair. She pressed herself hard into him as if she was trying to forget the feel of my body and anything that might've transpired the previous months.

I'm beyond hurt, I'm devastated.

Just when I thought I had it all. Just when I almost really did have it all. I lost it.

Conclusion? She doesn't love me, and she never did.

I'm just an experiment in her world. A protagonist in her "sexy and wild"

drunken story. A one-night stand. Something to laugh and talk about with her actual love interests.

I'll try to move on and tell myself she didn't matter that much to me.

Yet, there's 3 things I've never been good at.

1. Lying to myself, because I do truly and deeply love her. I wish I could wake up beside her, kiss her good morning, and call her mine. I want to hold her as we watch the sunset again. I wanted her to be my special girlfriend.

2. Science. The signs were all there. Her flippant nature when I talked about love deeply. The fact if I looked a little bit deeper, she always talked about liking women superficially and always ogled men. If I organized my data better, I could have drawn the conclusion sooner and maybe less painfully. The experiment should've never happened, I should've known the second I saw her- she was too beautiful for me.

3. Love, because look at me now. Single, never had a girlfriend, but I'll always carry a broken heart.

It hurts to be just another experiment in her life, because she was more than just an experiment to me.

## *Emptied*

While                      your                      tender                      hands  
 Run                      down                      from                      my                      hair  
 Touching                      my                      shoulder  
 Then meeting my chest  
 You                      breathe                      me                      in  
 And                      kiss                      my                      neck

I                      feel                      your                      hands                      down                      my                      legs  
 Miles                      and                      miles                      of                      tingling                      skin  
 I                      start                      to                      feel                      myself                      sinking  
 You                      kiss                      me                      long                      and                      hard  
 With                      hands                      on                      inner                      thighs  
 Our                      legs                      entwined  
 And                      my                      heart                      panicking

I forget how to breathe  
 As you lay on top of me  
 I feel so numb  
 Face sticky with salty wet tears  
 My throat closes up  
 And my body goes limp

I want you to stop  
 But not even a whisper will escape my lips  
 As you force my body down  
 I feel my soul dying

I wish I had been stronger  
 Because now  
 You have stripped my life away  
 And as I sit here with my pain  
 In my blood stained underwear  
 And tear stained eyes  
 I feel nothing

*Kimberly Braet*

*I've Been Having Trouble Sleeping*

Every time I stay here it's the same,  
by night the house is silent  
aside from that raspy cough down the hall.

A blue light lined up so perfectly,  
Cutting into my eyes wide shut  
missing yours by mere centimeters.  
What kind of cruel misfortune is that?

The same ancient fan  
older than I am,  
spinning on two, dust clinging to the frame,  
Just right at 10:00,  
frozen solid by 9:00.

The way the sheets,  
on my corner at least,  
creep from under the bed  
pass my pillow  
and slip beneath me.

The space between the mattress and the wall  
steals my water bottles night after night,  
cooking them on the radiator  
and swallowing them whole into its' outdated maw.

Your blankets are too short for me.  
No matter which direction I flip it  
my feet are too damn big for them  
sticking out like half-buried posts and dangling off the edge.

Every day it's the same  
and I can't sleep,  
but that's fine with me.  
Because you're always there, in that same spot to my right,

and everything else takes on a different shape in the dark of your room,  
holding my attention night after night.

*Trent Betham*

## *Sumere: The Painting God*

Sumere, a painting god, stood above his empty canvas stroking his chin, unsure of how to go about creation. All the other painting gods had found their knack, their style, and had flaunted their realizations ceaselessly out in the streets--for everything a painting god painted gained life and power attributed to the form given it by the god. This, however, was only possible when the painting god had found that style of creation that so befitted them that their godly powers flow out onto the canvas without control, forming something grand and unintended, but most of all, alive.

Sumere had gone through myriads of painting styles, many were impressive imitations of the styles of more Realized painting gods, and some paintings were even borne from styles exclusively trademarked by Sumere, yet they did not speak to him, they did not flow into the world like they should have.

Sumere looked at his paintings, remembering all the sweat and toil put into creating each and the complete lack of payoff that came from observing their lack of motion. It infuriated Sumere, and with one angry motion he slapped the can of red paint resting near the blank canvas and it landed squarely on the floor of his studio, garnering every item on the floor with subtle and long streaks of glowing red.

Sumere turned to walk away, wanting to rest and start his toil again in the morning, but some unexplainable inclination compelled him to turn around. And when he did, he found that the large red splash upon the floor that had before only slightly splattered a few objects – bowls, brushes, etc., had now completely engulfed them in color. Their forms could still be seen like bumps in the splash, but now they were all completely red, and from the top of each object a trickling of the red color ascended upward like a reverse stream with small bubbles resting in the midst.

This had never happened before. Nothing he had painted had ever reacted quite like this. He wondered, had he really found his style? And

with so little effort? In his amazement, he bumped a shelf piled high with all kinds of paints and from the very top fell a small can of green paint. It landed among the red and mixed slightly with it, engulfing the can it resided in and proceeding to rise into the air, tapping Sumere lightly on his nose.

Sumere dabbed his nose and grinned. "That is my style," he said. He grabbed another can of paint from the shelf and splashed it upon himself, then proceeded to dance onto the canvas that was his studio.

"Chaos!" He said proudly. "Effortless creation."

He tipped his table over and watched it roll into the color.

"Destruction!" He yelled.

He watched the paint climb all around , creating an explosion of color that reached toward the ceiling, longing for the sky.

He continued to do this for hours and hours, dumping buckets upon buckets of paint into the mixture and flinging brushes and throwing objects everywhere, eyes closed so not to disrupt the flow of randomness which seemed to be the life of his art. And when he finally felt like he had done everything possible with the colors at his disposal he opened his eyes and peered around his studio, nearly brought to tears by the majesty of color that seemed to come out of his strange and seemingly meaningless actions. And as he looked at the colors morph and move about the floor rising into the sky fueled by his godly powers, he finally felt satisfied, even as he stared at his prior paintings, the ones that he had struggled in making, overshadowed by the fruits of his aesthetic unleashed, he still could not help but feel completely and totally satisfied.

He did not feel that he could add more to what he saw, in fear of disrupting something that was meant to be, but still he wondered if what he saw had not reached its full potential, if there was still something he



could offer it to improve its beauty. He then realized something.

He ran into a small room in his studio that he scarcely ever ventured to. He wiggled around among the junk heaps piled inside until he finally found what he was looking for--a large can of Black paint.

Sumere never cared for the color black, he felt it something like a color placed in the background of great art, a constructor of lines and nothing more, entirely incapable of producing a sense of pleasure in a person, perhaps a sense of dread or neutrality but not pleasure. But the art god had realized many unexpected potentials of the colors that surrounded him on that day and wondered if he could be proven wrong just as well with the color black. He wondered if this bucket of black in his hand was the true finishing touch of his art.

Sumere walked into the center of his studio, held out the bucket of black paint, closed his eyes, and spun around rapidly, flinging the black paint every direction until the bucket was empty. Sumere threw the bucket against the wall at the end of his spin and opened his eyes immediately to see what he had created.

Almost as soon as his eyes opened, he felt a deep sense of regret. All he did was besmirch his colorful art with numerous empty voids.

He knelt onto the floor and began to sob into his hands.

“It is ruined!” He yelled.

And as soon as those words escaped his lips, something unprecedented happened. Beneath Sumere’s knees, he could feel something slithering. When he looked down, he had found that it was the paint. It was moving, but not as it had before. It seemed to be retreating somewhere. Sumere turned around to find his painting. All the color he had thrown was crawling into each of the hundreds of black marks that he had thrown. The paint that had risen to the ceiling was now falling to

the floor and flowing into the blackness that he felt he had created out of foolishness.

Within a few short seconds. All that had remained of his painting were the black dots.

He walked over to one of them, the smallest dot he could perceive, and bent over to touch it. As his finger went towards the black dot, he found that it did not press any kind of surface, but that it kept going down. It was not a black dot, but a black hole.

Sumere's expectations were again defied, and excitedly he placed his eye in front of the hole and what he saw was beyond the beauty ever before conceived by any god. There were colors racing each other, folding into a white void, like light speeding into the unknown at incredible speeds and then returning once again to where they left mere seconds later. There were even colors that had not been included in his original painting. There were even colors he had never seen. It was all so titillating that Sumere had to stop looking down into the hole or the sheer ecstasy of what he took part in creating would give him a heart attack. He lied down before his creation and looked on at it with dreary and proud eyes, utterly satisfied, refusing to move.

Even as each of the holes expanded and ate up the natural colors of his studio that had long been there prior to his painting, even as the holes sucked in the walls that made up his studio, even as they brought down into them all the life and color of the realm of the painting gods, and even as they claimed the color and form of their master Sumere--he did not waiver in his unmoving admiration.

Instead he whispered into the void that slowly began to crush his now white colorless form, the words he felt were most needed of speaking:

“Truly this is the finishing touch.”

*Cameron Crouse*

*5 Minutes and 23 Seconds*

Tick.Tick.Tick.

The desolate ticking of the clock on the wall  
Repeats itself over and over again as I sit on my bathroom floor  
Crying over a boy, barely on the cusp of a man  
Who I gave a piece of myself to.

Tick.Tick.Tick.

I wait anxiously for my phone to vibrate  
Any kind of affection  
But it remains silent through the night  
As I wonder who he's with and if they will make love  
under the same moon as we once did.

Tick.Tick.Tick.

I feel weak and helpless  
But I know once I hear that buzz my heart will leap into my chest  
As I frantically check to see if its him.  
It's not.

Tick.Tick.Tick.

So here I sit in the silence that doesn't seem to drown out my thoughts  
As they scream at me  
Telling me how foolish I am to sit and wait for someone  
Counting the ticks of a clock that knows our time here is done

Tick.Tick.Tick.

*Abigail Kauffman*

## *What Happened to the Earth?*

When I was thirteen, the sky touched the ground.  
The light blue abyss squeezed and pinched,  
Until it bent all the way down.  
The most peculiar thing, no one flinched.

No one asked why.  
They just accepted it and dealt with the pitch of this concave Earth.  
The sad thing is, they didn't even try.  
Maybe because they didn't understand its worth.

They liked it better before, when they didn't have to climb up and down,  
Nonetheless, they climb  
with their heads down.



## *Dreams of a Homecoming Queen*

You didn't want this  
Cold, callused and amiss  
Beauty queen of the hour  
Faded now is your power  
You thought your tribulations were over  
Always crying in the dark, only my birth could make you momentarily  
sober

I arrived just the way you wanted  
All your hopes and dreams for a little girl  
I'll be a perfect mother, let me give it a whirl!  
But I grew up to disgust you  
Embodying all the anger you once endured and knew

You dreamed of a wedding and family  
But I'm not allowed to be your definition of conventional and happy  
Reality wavers as you accept your daughter  
But every day you wish she wasn't at all like her father  
The unconditional love of a mother is what I've always wanted  
Without your compassion and empathy, I'll forever be haunted

You were my first love  
A love I once thought to have descended from above  
But I was wrong  
I'll forever search for your warmth even if I never belong  
I'll never give up on the admiration for you and love I once felt  
One day I'll miss you and will reminisce on the little moments of what we  
shared  
I have always been alone without you, endlessly scared

*Whitney Bender*

## *Thank You for Not Letting Me Die*

You picked me up from the  
fires of hell and dragged me  
out of the cave where darkness  
tried to bring me to my demise.

When my mind was in the  
shadows you were there  
to bring it back into the light.  
There is a heart of gold in you  
that beats so true and shines  
so bright.

It takes someone with an abundance  
of care and patience in them.  
Heart and soul to show to  
deal with a broken soul like  
me.

Thank you for being the light  
that glistens through the shadows  
of darkness.

Thank you for not letting me  
die in shadow and fire  
ice and pain.

Thank you for being there  
every step of the way.

## *A Letter to My Daughter*

If I have a daughter, I will tell her that when society raises a little girl, it teaches her to hate herself. She is told that she is worthless, that she is not skinny enough, not pretty enough, not good enough. It will tell her to measure her worth by how many men want her and then shame her for being with those men. I will tell my daughter this because I want her to know that she is so much more than what society says she is. I will tell her that I was just like her when I was younger. I scoffed at what society said on the outside, but really, I just wanted to belong.

I will tell her this. I will tell her that she will want to belong too. I will tell her that she will have friends, peers, and even partners that will want her to be something that she is not and yet she will want to at the same time just to feel like she means something to those people. I will tell her that she does not need to do those things or be those things to matter, that her life matters because she says it does and she is the only one who needs to say so. I will tell her that society has no heart and does not love her. She will not believe me.

I will tell her that she will change her mind again and again about what she wants to be. Again, she will look to society to tell her. I will tell her that society cannot and should not dictate who she is, but she will not hear me. Society will beat her down again and again. She will grow stronger and learn to hate society too.

One day she may have a daughter of her own. She will tell her daughter about how society chewed her up and spit her back out, how she loved society, but it had no love for her. Her daughter will not listen, for she has already fallen prey to humanity's monster.

*Kathryn Milliren*



*Skin and Rain*

It is lying on your back  
while into your skin a raindrop sinks,  
burrowing around your spine, desperate for mud.

It is weight and static  
buzzing behind blurred clouds  
that spit anesthetic.

It is pulling pieces away.  
Bits of flakey ribs and stringy tendons come loose  
painlessly, though still you wait for the ache.

It is skin in-between  
the chill outside and the air whistling through,  
placid while something wriggles out.

You miss it without inviting it back.  
Now.

You want to swim the storm,  
uproot yourself from the rich decay.  
A nourishing poison when gone leaves only water.

You want to shed the skin,  
that gray and pruned hide  
incubating the new incarnation.

You want to choke on words,  
let lips smart on damp substance  
just to know the parts still work.

You want to flood yourself,  
hose off the endless muck  
for flesh whole and raw. New.

Stand. Leave what stays stuck.

## *I am Emotionally Unavailable*

I want to touch  
you.  
I cannot be in love  
with someone next  
in my queue.  
I am not myself,  
anymore.  
I want  
sex,  
lust,  
fucking,  
nothing to be sure.  
Pull on my hair,  
not my heartstrings.  
You are kind  
to me,  
though not one  
to fulfill  
my puzzle  
with your piece  
or expensive ring.  
I do miss  
companionship,  
sometimes,  
but I can live as  
self-employed.  
For now,  
just fill my void.

*Anonymous*

*Girl Playing Cello*



*Kelly Moriarty*

## *Worth*

Sometimes, I look at my feet  
And wonder their worth.  
Pale, small, and uncalloused,  
Much unlike the wolfish ones  
With sharp talons that I  
See, walking the Earth in great strides,  
Gripping the world with such power,  
And I cannot help but envy these  
Warrior-women; These  
Titans that demand respect.

My toes peek out from the  
Tub of steaming water,  
Surrounded by clouds of  
Iridescent bubbles,  
The walls thinning and  
Thinning, becoming less  
Incandescent and defined,  
... and then gone; faded  
From existence.  
And with a flash,  
I harvest my crops.

A flash on my mouth,  
My hands,  
My breasts,  
My thighs,  
And yes, my feet,  
And I remember the time when  
I connected a jar of fireflies to  
A tree with pieces of string  
And called it revolutionary.

Now, I long for a day that  
The flowers sing to me  
Like they once did,  
And the stars halo  
Around me before  
Falling to the Earth,  
And the First Tree melts  
Its woody flesh, revealing  
The Woman made of clay,  
And the bees buzzing in  
Honeycombs that  
Fill my womb  
Cease to exist.

## *Another*

As all around are dancing  
to the beat of the key,  
it would seem the last note  
has faded from being.

The scene has ended,  
I know that is my cue.  
It is time for me to take the stage  
and show them all what I can do.

To the light of the stage, I stride  
and face the audience in the midst.  
Though my body has ceased its motion  
I yet begin to move my lips.

And as I do so  
I am no longer me,  
for the me of the past has receded  
you see.

What remains is simply  
“Another.”

“Another” is the voice of the script,  
the voice we’re scared to share,  
the voice that tosses nervous shackles  
and empties out our cares.

We have all been “Another;”  
we’ve known him all along.  
He talks as a speech, as a line, or a verse  
and shouts joy into a song.

My line ends  
and so begins the applause,

I snap back to myself,  
smile, and then pause.

How the voice has helped me  
throughout the course of my climb  
and oh how I wish to take hold of that voice  
and speak it all the time.

## *Love Her Enough*

He remembers how she looked that day. Kneeling on the bathroom floor, dry heaving over the porcelain rim of the toilet bowl, shoulders trembling. He stood in the doorway, wanting to go to her but not trusting she would let him in. And then she looked at him, water from the lakes of her eyes spilling over ghostly white cheeks and carving a path to her chin. Her mouth was agape, and her hand gripped the edge of the tub, and she had never looked as small to him as she did in that moment.

“Dexter.” She gulped great mouthfuls of air. He imagined her lungs burning with oxygen, expanding until her chest cracked and burst open, but his name still came out a whisper. She clung to that one word as if it were the only thing in the world that made sense. “Dexter, Dexter.”

He dropped to his knees beside her and pulled her to him. She was shaking so badly that he couldn’t keep her in place, so he moved with her, rocking back and forth gently. Her head fell easily onto his shoulder, pale strands of hair tickling his nose. She buried herself in him, tucking her legs up and curling into his embrace like a child in the cradle of his arms.

Hours earlier, her father had been found in his favorite armchair, head drooping to the side as if asleep. He’d put a bullet in his brain. The bloodstained note in his lap held only three words: I’m sorry Cas.

Dexter knew then, as his girlfriend clung to his shirt and begged him to please please make it go away oh please give him back I’ll do anything, that he would never forgive anyone who made her this small.

\*\*\*

“Mr. Rogan?”

Dexter looks up, pulling himself from his memories and back into the sterile white-walled office he’s been trapped in for the past hour. Snow blows past the picture window in hazy drifts, but next to the radiator it’s stifling, and he wipes his sweaty palms on his coat. He shifts and feels his keys prod him sharply from his back pocket, an unpleasant reminder of how far he is from home. The couch he sits on dwarfs him; he



is a boy again in its grasp.

The therapist is staring at him. Something about the way she's decorated her face with powder and gloss, the way she's clad herself in boots with fur on the edges and a teal scarf and a long plaid skirt has him feeling under-dressed. He wonders how he must look to her now - a man more bone than skin, with dark circles under his eyes and ink-stained fingers that crawl and twitch and flutter like a moth in a spider's web.

"Sorry," he says. "What were we talking about?"

"I asked about your medication. The new doctor I referred you to - does he seem to be a better fit? I know you had some...*concerns* the last time we spoke."

New doctor. The one with the nose ring? No, that was last month's - she was talking about the guy with pictures of horses on his desk.

"He's alright."

She nods, as if those two stupid words are the most important things she's heard all day. "And he's taken you down to 100 milligrams of Sertraline, correct? Now as I recall, the last time we changed your dosage you experienced some side effects." She checks the lined legal pad in her lap. "Insomnia, indigestion, and lack of appetite, I think you said. Any issues this time?"

Dexter can't remember the therapist's name. He knows she told him the first time they met, but there have been many sessions since then and when he thinks back on their initial introduction, the only thing he can recall is her cold hand in his as he signed his privacy away. It starts with an "L", he thinks. Linda or Leena or...something.

"No, nothing like that. I feel better than ever. In fact, I was

wondering how quickly you could get me off the medication.”

Her brow furrows. “Off?”

Dexter focuses on the blackboard over her shoulder, so juvenile and out-of-place here. *Shoot for the stars! Never give up! Learn how to dance in the rain!* The phrases scream at him from its dark surface, punctuated by smiley faces printed in yellow chalk. “Yeah, y’know, so I don’t have to... to take it anymore.”

Linda-or-Leena looks down at her notes. Shuffles them. Looks back up at him. “Mr. Rogan, I don’t think I follow. We just put you on Sertraline a few weeks ago. You told me it was helping.”

“It is! But...” *They all work at first.* Dexter bites down on the words, holds them in place, and they burn a hole in his tongue.

The therapist sighs. “Your girlfriend, Cassandra - does she know you want to stop taking your medication?”

Dexter inwardly recoils. He makes it a point to keep Cas far away from these little talks, and her name does not belong in this therapist’s mouth, this white-walled room. “She’s actually my fiancé now,” Dexter says, and he doesn’t know why he bothers but it feels better somehow, because *girlfriend* strikes him as childish in the way that the blackboard with the smiley faces is childish.

“Congratulations,” the therapist says. Then she waits for Dexter to answer her question. She will not be distracted.

“Well I haven’t...haven’t exactly discussed it with her yet. But I will. I just have to wait until she recovers from the anniversary tomorrow, and in the meantime I thought we could keep lowering the dosage -”

“What’s tomorrow?”

Dexter pauses. “Sorry?”

“You said Cas needed to ‘recover from the anniversary tomorrow’. Anniversaries are usually happy occasions, aren’t they?”

“I...no, that’s...I didn’t say that, did I?”

The therapist looks at her notepad. That goddamn notepad. “You did.”

Dexter’s fingers tug at his coat sleeves. Dance across his lap. Twine together in a white-knuckled grip. “Right. Yes. Of course I did. Uh, Cassandra’s father killed himself a year ago tomorrow. He...shot his own... uh, head. His neighbor found him, some teenager who cut his grass once a week, and this kid had Cas’ number so she gave us a call. She told us he was dead over the *phone*.” Dexter reminds himself to breath.

Linda-or-Leena steepled her fingers. “And the anniversary of his death gives you anxiety. Why?”

Dexter shrugs. “Dunno.”

“Is it possible you see a lot of yourself in what he -”

“What’s your name again?” Dexter asks. “I can’t remember. It’s been driving me crazy.”

She opens her mouth but the timer interrupts her, breaking the spell that holds Dexter to the couch.

He shoots up instantly.

If she notices his eagerness to leave, she doesn't show it. "Do you want to stay a bit longer, Mr. Rogan? I know you said you had work to do, but..."

"No, no. I really should be getting home. Got a deadline coming up." Dexter's smile is held up by invisible strings pulling taut against his cheeks. "But thanks. For, uh, the offer."

The therapist gives him a long, searching look. "Of course. We can talk about your dosage next week, then. Maybe you could bring Cassandra along - it sounds like this time of year is very trying for her."

Dexter has a hand on the doorknob when she clears her throat.

"Mr. Rogan?"

He turns back, bracing himself for more questions. More judgment. More friendly suggestions.

"My name is Madison."

\*\*\*

Sertraline. 100 mg. A tiny, innocent white tablet. *Take once every morning.* Dexter's already put it off for as long as he dares - the sun has gone down by the time he drags himself to the bathroom and roots around in the medicine cabinet for his prescription bottle. He has to take it at least one time this week or he won't be able to keep any food down, and Cas will notice.

He looks at himself in the mirror above the sink. Part of him can still feel Madison's eyes boring into him from therapy that morning, stripping him bare and leaving him to die on the baby blue tiles of the bathroom floor.

*Is it possible you see a lot of yourself in what he-*

Dexter closes his eyes. He doesn't open his mouth but shoves the Sertraline between rigid lips, tapping it against his teeth. Dexter holds the tablet in his mouth for as long as he can before it starts to melt, stabbing his tongue with its bitterness. He remembers Cas, how small she looked on this ugly blue-tiled floor. Then he swallows.

That's when the anger boils up, red and hot beneath his adam's apple. Dexter doesn't want that little white thing inside him, doesn't want it messing with his head, doesn't want to need it so much. Because eventually it will fail him. He'll get low again, on some impossibly long afternoon when he's alone in the house with nothing but drugs in his bathroom and voices in his head. He'll start to think about Cas' father. He'll start to think about the handgun hidden away in the coat closet, and his fingers will start to twitch.

*Is it possible you see a lot of yourself in what he -*

The pill has barely gone down his throat before he shoves his fingers after it and brings it up again.

Dexter hunches over the sink as he empties the contents of his stomach. He waits until he's sure it's all out, then wipes his mouth with the back of his hand and washes the bile down the drain with cold water.

From the living room, he hears keys jingling in the lock on the front door.

Dexter turns the sink off and rushes from the bathroom.

Then he sees her, and he's just as enchanted as he was the first time they met.

Fine strands of corn silk hair frame her face, having escaped from her hasty Dutch braid. The muscles in her arms are well-defined beneath her sheer blouse, and she has a square jaw, and laugh lines crease her

cheeks. As soon as she's through the door, she kicks her heels off, but even without them she is a good two inches taller than Dexter. She looks at him, and her face melts into a smile.

The fire in Dexter's esophagus is quenched by a torrent of icy shame. He thinks about the pills waiting in their bottle, the gun in the closet, the woman of his dreams retching into a toilet because of one stupid phone call. Dexter shoves his hands in his pockets so she doesn't see him digging his nails into his palms. "Hi, Cassie."

Cas takes three running-steps and throws her arms around him, planting a kiss on his cheek.

Dexter feels the buckle of her overalls against his fingers as he hugs her back. Despite everything, it's easy to convince himself that Cas is still untouched by the realities of the world - she packs lunches in brown paper bags and thinks just about anything can be solved with a kiss and an ice cream cone.

"I was thinking about you today," she says, winking at him conspiratorially.

He blinks, imagining her daydreaming about him in front of a room of second-graders, and can't help but laugh. "Right."

"I was." Cas swats his shoulder and practically dances into the kitchen, where he's kept the spaghetti warm on the stove. "From the Pledge of Allegiance to my lunch break. I was wondering how far you'd gotten in your article. The one about the Ice Festival."

"Oh."

Cas heaps sauce-covered noodles into a bowl and hops up to sit on the counter. She looks at him and tilts her head. "Did you finish it?"

His eyes immediately snag on a stain in the living room carpet.  
 “Uh...”

*No. I went to therapy and then I came home and slept for three hours and watched TV and ate all the Christmas cookies in the freezer and slept for another hour and tried to take a stupid little pill and didn't because I'm a fucking coward.*

“Sort of.” He grins sheepishly at her. “It's...coming along.”

“I can't wait to read it. What a perfect opportunity for you to show off your narrative skills. The way you write imagery is just breathtaking.”

“A journalistic piece isn't really the same as descriptive narrative, Cas.” It comes out drier than Dexter intended, and her heavy silence has him dragging his gaze back to her.

She's crying.

Dexter stands shocked for a moment, then takes a few faltering steps forward. “Cassie?”

Cas puts a hand to her streaming eyes. He can tell she's angry with herself from the way she rubs them as if she wants to tear them out. “No, it's nothing. Don't worry.”

“I'm sorry. I didn't mean to sound so harsh.”

“It wasn't you, Dex. It's just...I was thinking about Dad today, too.”

He flashes back to his therapy session that morning and silently berates himself. Of course she's upset, the anniversary is tomorrow. How could it have slipped his mind? Dexter presses a kiss to her hairline. “Oh,

Cas.”

She leans into him as if to hide her tears. “You know, it’s funny - up until he...he passed, I was so sure I hated him for driving Mom away. I wanted nothing to do with him. God, I never even introduced you two. Did I tell you I used to catch him burying his pill bottles in the backyard? I’d get so mad. I thought he didn’t want to get better, that he was making our lives hard on purpose.” She laughs, but it comes out as a sob. “But he...he would take me to baseball games sometimes, even if he didn’t want to go. And he came to all of my school musicals even though I couldn’t sing like the other girls and only ever played extras. He always told me how p-proud he was to have a daughter like me.”

Cas tightens her grip on Dexter and breathes hard, trying to get herself under control. Finally, she pulls away and tries to smile, and it’s like watching sunlight shimmer across the surface of a lake. “I’m sorry, Dex. I told myself I wouldn’t do this tonight.”

Dexter keeps his hands on her shoulders, massaging them with his thumbs. “You never have to apologize to me, okay? I want you to open up when you feel like this.”

“No, don’t worry. It comes and goes.” She brushes at her eyes, gently this time. “See? Already gone.”

Dexter frowns. “You don’t have to pretend for me, Cas.”

Cas looks up at him, startled. “I’m not.”

“I know you’re still hurting. Any time there’s a lull in our conversations, you go somewhere I can’t follow. You cry in bed when you think I’m asleep. And you work yourself to death all day, as if you’re running from something. I wish...I wish you would trust me, Cas. I want to help you get through this.”



She takes Dexter's hand in hers, eyes wide. "God, Dexter, no, it's not like that at all. It's just...well, you try so hard for me, Dexter. Like my dad used to. I didn't see it back then, but I do now, and if you can handle what you're going through than I can handle this." Cas smiles again, and it's brighter now. "So I was thinking - you should write love sonnets, like you did when we were in high school."

Dexter allows her to change the subject, but he sits next to her on the counter and puts his arm around her shoulders. "I only wrote those to get your attention."

She laughs. "Bullshit. You liked writing them - it had nothing to do with me."

"Okay, maybe. But you can't make a living in this world writing poems."

"You always said you were going to sell them. A whole book full. What happened to that?"

He shrugs.

Cas nestles her head against his shoulder. Her next words are tentative, as if she's trying to tiptoe around the subject. "You should take it up again. Send them off to some publishers. Maybe...maybe that would make you happy."

Dexter doesn't want to talk about happiness. He doesn't want Cas to ask him how his therapy session went, how he felt today, how much he ate and did you take your medicine Dexter?

"Maybe," he says.

\*\*\*

The next morning, Dexter lies in bed staring at the ceiling. His

phone buzzes from across the room, but he makes no move to retrieve it. He already knows what has popped up on the screen, that simple reminder he's set for himself every morning.

*Take your medicine.*

Today is Tuesday. No - Wednesday. Which means a year ago today, Cas' father wrote three words on a piece of paper and sat in his favorite armchair and chose to leave her.

Today is a bad day. Nothing feels right, everything is wrong, and God, he has to get up and take a shower and get dressed and write that article and buy groceries and try to take his medicine. Then he has to mail the rest of the wedding invitations because oh God the wedding is in eight weeks.

Dexter just woke up, and already he's impossibly tired.

There is a gun in the coat closet by the front door. It rests, unloaded, on the top shelf, hidden in the shadows cast by the closet's single light bulb. Dexter gets low and it's waiting for him. The chamber is empty but he could fill it - slide a cartridge in, fingers dancing fluttering twitching like a moth, slide the bullet in and put the barrel to his eye, stare it right in the face, and he's never shot a gun before but he could, all you gotta do is squeeze the trigger *BAM* just like that, it's easy Cas says, Cas -

So small on the bathroom floor, retching into the toilet, whispering his name. The only thing in the world that made sense.

Dexter curls up in bed, puts his hands over his ears as if he could block out his own traitorous thoughts. He's gone down this path before, more times than he can count. For a while, it got so bad he isolated himself completely, pushed everyone away, because when he inevitably put the barrel of a gun to his eye the only heart he wanted to break was his own. But somehow, at his lowest, Cas had gotten in. Cas with her

beautiful smile, her corn silk hair. Cas with the father who didn't take his pills and eventually shot himself in the head.

*Is it possible you see a lot of yourself in what he -*

*A lot of yourself -*

*See a lot of yourself*

Dexter screams into his pillow but it doesn't make the voices go away. His mind won't stop talking to him, calling him selfish, asking why oh why *why did you let her in?* He always knew how this was going to end - with a pathetic apology written on card stock and a coat-closet gun with a single bullet in the chamber. He knew, because something was broken inside him, something he couldn't fix. He knew, and he still dragged Cas into his mess.

Dexter remembers his lowest points, before Cas. His long walks in the dark with a gun in his coat pocket, the only constant in his lonely life. Even back then, there were people waiting for him at home - his mother, for a while, and then his college roommate, and his first girlfriend, the clumsy one who was always breaking dishes. Dexter left them all behind, going off to die on his own like a stray cat who can sense the end approaching. And when he inevitably pulled himself back from that edge, when he unloaded the pistol and held the innocent cartridge against his palm, when all he had left was the fear that those people waiting at home would somehow find him with his brains blown out or see a picture of his corpse in the paper, Dexter would run. New city, new people to abandon. Because at least then they could live with the hope that he wasn't dead.

So why is Cas any different?

Dexter stops screaming. He sits up in bed. His fingers are motionless on the sheets.

\*\*\*

Dexter is waiting by the door when Cas gets home.

She bursts in like a hurricane, already bare-footed, holding her shoes in one hand and a bouquet of roses in the other. "Dexter! I wanted to make up for my mood yesterday." Her smile lights up the room as she sweeps past him, snow melting in her hair and on her coat. "A dozen red roses, like you always get me for Valentine's Day. And I asked around - my coworkers said they would be very interested to read any poems you write and give you feedback. Isn't that great? I -"

"Cassandra."

Something in Dexter's voice gives her pause, and she turns to look at him.

He's still standing by the door.

Cas' eyes are uneasy now, but she continues to smile. "What are you doing, silly? Come help me find a vase for these flowers. I want to hear about your day."

"Cassandra. I...I have to go."

She blinks at him. "Oh. Alright. Just...don't be home too late if you're going to the store. You know I worry when the roads are this bad."

"Cas..."

"In fact, unless you absolutely have to go out, I'd much prefer you stay here tonight and get whatever it is you need tomorrow."

"Cas."

"What?" She suddenly snaps. "Goddamn it Dexter, what?" But she's not angry. Her eyes are wide and her face is bloodless. She's staring

at his fingers.

Dexter can't look at her. She is a memory, a pale ghost of the person she was when she broke a year ago on the bathroom floor. Why did he have to wait for her to come home? Why didn't he just go when he had the chance? He can't do this. He's not strong enough.

Dexter closes his eyes. "I love you, Cassie."

Silence.

Then, "Dexter, have you taken your medicine today?"

He hears her moving toward him, and his eyes fly open and he backs into the door. "Don't," he says.

Cas stops. She raises her hands, as if in surrender, and he wonders what she sees on his face. "Okay, alright, Dexter. Just...just hang on a second."

"I have to go, Cas, I have to go."

She bites her lip. Dexter can't look at her. Dexter can't stop looking at her. "Go where? Dexter, I don't understand, you're scaring me Dexter. Just come sit with me, please? Tell me what's going on."

Dexter shakes his head. His back presses against the door. He fumbles for the knob.

Cas takes another step forward, and he throws his hand out as if to physically hold her back. "Stay there! Don't come any closer!"

"Okay, okay Dexter. Everything is fine. It's fine, okay? Just calm down."

“I *can't*.”

“Why? Tell me why, Dexter, let me help you.”

Dexter puts his hands over his ears. “Because, damn it! Because every time I look in the mirror...every time I talk to that therapist and stay in bed when I should be providing for you and...and stop taking my pills...I see your father in me. I see him with that gun pressed to his head but it's my hand pulling the trigger, because I'm just one bad day shy of being him. And I'm terrified, because I can't *do that* to you Cas, I can't hurt you like that, I can't put you through that again. I know you see it too, Cas, I know you do, you see him too, and it's so hard, Cas, because you're the only thing that makes me happy anymore -”

Cas' arms wrap around his waist.

Dexter reels back, and the door is open now, and he's trying to push her away, away from his crazy twisted mind, away from this wretched broken thing. But he's too hysterical, and he's shaking so badly. In this moment, Cas is stronger than him, and she pins his arms to his sides.

She's stronger, but when she whispers in his ear she's small. So small, and so quiet that Dexter has to stop and listen. Like that day on the bathroom floor. “Please, please Dexter, you're all I have and I I-love you, I love you too, okay? Dexter, *please*.”

*Please please make it go away oh please give him back I'll do anything.*

Dexter stills in her arms. He sees rose petals scattered across the carpet.

He remembers that day - a single phone call, a note with three words, a broken woman pleading with God. He remembers the promise he made to himself, the one sin he could never forgive. And he's crying now, because it's too late. If he walks out into the night, if he leaves her

here with the pills in the drain and the roses on the living room floor, she will never stop being small.

They stay like this, entwined in the space between. Cas lets him empty himself out. He knows that she can sense the change in him, can feel the tension draining from his bones.

Cas waits until Dexter goes quiet. Then she reaches out, puts a hand on the partially-open door. "I'm going to close this," Cas whispers.

And he loves her enough to let her.

## *Oxymoron of War*

A born warrior,  
Who does not like the weight of the sword.  
The blade that slices,  
And the tip that pierces deep.  
Because deep down she has the urge to pray for her enemies  
A veteran who has never fought a battle,  
But is fighting a war  
Thus, the reason why every wound cuts deep  
What's the point of healing when the scars are still visible  
Ugly reminders of war tattooed into the skin, etched into the memory  
Scars from a war she was drafted into  
There is no time for resentment  
She must grow accustomed to the sword  
Or she will be held ransom by the wounds on her soul

~ The Story of the Stagnant Warrior



*Boiling Point*

There is a forest fire  
raging inside of my chest  
igniting my heart  
and scorching my veins.  
The fire never comes out,  
it never goes out,  
it burns and blisters  
boiling until it reaches  
a point.  
The fire turns my blood  
to steam, that rises  
slipping through cracks,  
crevices, that I can  
hardly protect until  
I'm suddenly crying.  
At this point the fire  
has been roaring  
too long for me to remember  
why it had even started  
in the first place.  
So I cry at nothing,  
at anything,  
at everything  
until my blood runs cold  
and my heart is ash  
only for it to rise  
like a phoenix  
and sit in my chest  
once more waiting  
for another fire  
to spark.

*Introspective**Ryan Krueger*

*Silence*

Tell me,  
Are you happy?  
Do you find joy in life's small things?  
Or does life seem dull and boring?

Tell me,  
When do you find yourself smiling?  
Just mindlessly throughout the day?  
Or does it fade once the joke has passed?

Tell me,  
Is your mind confident?  
Does it encourage you to push forward?  
Or does it demean and guilt you?

Tell me,  
Is a bad day just temporary?  
Does it disappear with the waves?  
Or does it linger and cause chaos?

Tell me,  
Is your nervousness anxiety?  
Does it pass after the task at hand?  
Or does it attack without rhyme or reason?

Tell me,  
So, I may know you better.  
Teach me your language.  
I want to hear your voice and stories.

Tell me,  
It doesn't have to be with words.  
Just sit quietly beside me.  
I am fluent in silence.

*Wilt*

You plucked each petal  
Alone  
Under a sky as blank as creation  
It was pouring, I remember  
The way you mingled with the rain  
And you were sitting there  
Watching me

“I love you,”  
“I love you not.”

And so you went, on and on  
For what seemed like months  
Years, even  
And I couldn't bare to look at you  
I couldn't stand the thought of you  
Not because I didn't love you  
But because you could never love me

And as you marred that poor daisy  
Hands made of razing desolation  
Chocolate eyes ablaze

I couldn't escape the thought  
That over and over, I died for you  
Just as quickly as I'd lived

*Running Water*



## *Love Mountains*

I do not have to do anything  
to deserve to be loved.

it didn't even cross my mind  
until you told me  
that I shouldn't have to move mountains  
to be loved,  
and suddenly so many things became clear:  
why I feel the constant need to give,  
like maybe if I give someone enough of my own soul  
they would be so kind as to give me some of theirs in return.  
and, if I didn't get it back,  
maybe I just need to give a little more,  
cut my skin a little deeper to bleed out  
and say "look at what I did for you,  
how much will it take for you to love me?"

I realize now  
that I've been asking the wrong things  
of the wrong people.  
no amount of my soul or sacrifice  
could make anyone give me what I wanted.  
I have transactions instead of friendships  
except I'm the one who's always paying.

over and over again I will tell myself  
"I do not have to do anything  
to be deserving of love."

one of these days I will believe it.

*Andrea Kling*

*To My 11th Grade History Teacher Who Said: “Racism isn’t a thing anymore.”*

Welcome to the Trump era  
And thank you for your contribution.  
I’m sure you didn’t mean  
To belittle the struggles  
Of millions of colored people  
When you denied the racists  
while explaining that the KKK  
had every right to march  
on Washington.  
And thank you  
for the year of confusion  
I spent wondering if white people  
really thought racism died in the 60s.  
Wondering if all white people  
were as ignorant as you.  
I hope the latest wave of police brutality  
and white activist screaming,  
“Go back to your country”  
to an American citizen  
has changed you mind.  
If it hasn’t,  
then I guess nothing  
will, but stop telling  
your students  
that racism has stopped  
because it’s here,  
and will stay as long  
as there’s one person  
who looks at our skin,  
our hair,  
our faces,  
and sees less  
than we are.

*Ariana Tomb*

*Forgotten Friend*



*Megan Stambaugh*



*Like a Ghost*

You pulled me close  
Like a ghost  
I left my body  
Evaporated  
into thin air when  
you touched me  
yanked my zipper down  
I stood above  
my lifeless body  
Searching  
for reality  
Gasping  
for clean air

## *Missing Light*

1.

Another missed call.

the phone widget has an unheard of red seventeen in the right corner.

The calls come so rapidly it's impossible to do anything but

decline decline decline

*Why*

It'll stop eventually.

A person as undedicated as he could never keep this up for so long.

Ah, here come the messages— how is this my fault?

Ignore mute swipe away

*Stop*

2.

“It wasn't always like this”

I repeat like a mantra as I

read through hundreds of angry messages from someone I

might have loved once.

*Remember*

I know childhood was nothing more than a blind fantasy

of obliviousness and naivete

ignoring the red flags I yet knew existed.

Every little girl's first hero is their ***father***

*Wrong*

3.

I will never answer his calls.

Not because I do not miss hearing his voice and

reminiscing of a time that never quite existed

but because his words are a poison that seeps through even the strongest

shield.

His calls are only made to  
*blame and twist and accuse and*  
*Lie.*

And I know I'm right until I talk to him.  
 Then after I'm so confused that I no longer know.  
 His tactics are so skilled that he leaves his opponent, no  
 his **daughter**  
 unsure of what's real and what isn't.  
*Manipulation*

4.

Unlike a bad breakup, a friendship ending,  
 no matter how hard I try  
 He's still part of me  
 he's on every record of myself  
 insurance, birth certificate, last name, and it is impossible to take that  
 away.  
*Stuck*

A sister of mine was fortunate enough to marry away the name and  
 forget  
 but we do not take the same paths, and so  
 the name stays.  
 While it is a reminder,  
 I want it to have a new meaning estranged from its founder.  
*Hope*

5.

Many in my place cannot move on.  
 The poison seeped through their heart and they can never recover  
 hatred burns deep within them that soils their lives and destroys their  
 hope.

but that *will* not be me.

Though I've yet to win the battle,  
on this ferocious sea of *hate pain wishing neglect guilt hoping*—

There is a lighthouse! in the distance  
shining towards me.

I'll make it to the shore.

With its light I can feel an emotion  
that washes away the damage he's done and the hurt, somehow, it's  
*Peace*

*How the U.S. Forgot Its History*

We changed from free and equal,  
Only to give racism a bigger sequel.  
We changed from democracy,  
Only to make a form of hypocrisy.  
We changed from how high,  
Only to tell the UN and the world bye bye.  
We changed from Superman,  
Only to show a laughing brand.  
We changed from the presidential touch,  
Only to lose global respect so much.  
We changed from a strong nation,  
Only to be the comical TV station.  
We changed from glowing horizons,  
Only to say *Let's be friends with lions*.  
We changed from help one another,  
Only to why should we love each other.  
We changed from such a great country,  
Only to adopt the bad habits we all see.

## *America Unseen*

If you are American and alive  
some may say or view it as you  
made it or you have succeeded.

But what about those hearts who  
are American and alive who wake  
before dawn. Without any caffeine or  
food and work their asses off to give us  
the fortunate ones what we want.

When they can't afford what they  
need.

From the nurse in the hospital who  
goes into the empty room to weep  
for the person that died on her table.  
To the soldiers that bust their spines,  
risk their health, and their lives and  
come home to nothing not even a home.

Why are they outcasted and not as a  
success? They have stories we just  
must let them tell them. They are not  
just a number they are humans and  
they deserve respect.

*Railroad Bridge*



*Whitney Bender*

## *We Are More Than What We Are Labeled*

Publicity hounds I used to call them

Where I was born freedom did not have much meaning to me  
 An identity I thought was given I didn't fully understand  
 I didn't share the same family tree nor dark history  
 For as far as I was concerned we were not dropped off on the same land

Publicity hounds I used to call them

But life had different plans for me  
 Soon I realized it didn't matter the family tree we had come from  
 Hate their skin their very existence is what the media did teach  
 The slogan plastered on every channel doing continuous runs

Publicity hounds I used to call them

I used to think they craved attention  
 Their continued fight for freedom was never mentioned  
 They etched this negativity into every young mind  
 Creating prejudice, bias, and racism that would last a lifetime

Publicity hounds I used to call them

Till one day a group of students stood their ground  
 Hatred rose up in me, blood boiled, I found anger where I thought it  
 could never be found  
 Coffee, juice, and syrup spilled from head to toe  
 Resilience in their stance they did show

Publicity hounds I used to call them

For their strength stood in their stillness, as if they knew  
 That one day their freedom would ring true



They looked forward heads held straight as if they could see the glory of  
what their skin would become  
And in that moment I realized that we were all one

Publicity hounds I used to call them

I had been blinded by the facade of what the White man wanted me to  
believe

To trick me into believing my own skin was the enemy  
For the true enemy was the enemy within  
A sin that had seen committed time and time again

They became we and them became us  
And from that day on is what I vowed to only trust  
I vowed that I must fight for what is just  
And everytime opposition would bark  
I would fight, for the new dream that lay deep at the core of my heart  
Till the day death do us part

For publicity hounds I used to call them,  
I used to call us

## *Big Square Gold Buttons*

My friend wears her avocado-colored shirt with pride.  
She knows I hate that shirt  
with the big square gold buttons.  
I told her not to buy it, she insisted it's on sale.  
Yuck, I said, I won't be borrowing that one.

I don't know what's brighter  
the avocado shirt or my friend's red hair.  
She doesn't care if she looks like a Christmas tree,  
it was on sale.  
Ugh, I said where's my sunglasses.

She's wearing the avocado-colored shirt  
with the big square gold buttons  
to parties.

She gets attention, when she opens the  
two top buttons, her push-up bra bursting  
and her red hair blown out.  
Oh, she is the talk of the night,  
especially when she leaves with the  
hottest guy.  
Yuck, I hate that avocado-colored shirt,  
especially, when those big square gold buttons  
trap a man.



*Kimberly Braet*

## *Maps*

My skin is a road map  
Veins of cities pumping blood across pale complexion  
Set up your houses with white picket fences  
Making yourself comfortable  
As ground quakes beneath you

You are a disease  
Sucking the life out of the very grass you build upon  
Digging into roads, into skin  
Destroying the essence of my being

I am left with this hollowing feeling of death  
The once vibrant veins of my cities still and lifeless  
This map is now a ghost town  
Closed-off highways littered with stalled out cars  
Dead-end roads of broken states

My skin is a road map  
That I pray you never travel again

## *Needless Trinkets*

“There’s a way that these things need to be done. You always follow it and it’s always okay. Everything has worth here under our sun. So, what is no longer of worth to you today?” The pawn shop owner asked, her deceptively young face holding in a pair of brown eyes that possessed a wisdom deep down in their pupils, the same wisdom cutting his gaze. Her fingers tapped against the warped cedar countertop that hid her rail thin legs, fingers moving rhythmically, but not to any recognizable song from this decade.

“I don’t need this anymore.” he said. An assortment of objects were flung from his pockets. Two silver pens, foreign change from the hemispheres of the world, a watch; worn but worthwhile, and a single tooth, a moral perhaps. They lay on the counter, rolling and shifting until settling down into the divots and creases of the table-top plateau.

“There is a way that things need to be done” she repeated. “Wash your hands three times in the basin.” She motioned to an ornamental dish engraved with a set of looping curves and knots that covered its’ surface. “Cleanse them of the past, wash your palms of the meaning of these objects and anything that they ever could mean to you”. Her fingers stopped clattering away at the wooden surface only to sweep above the counter-top, signaling for him to get moving.

“Wash my hands? In there?” he asked. “You want me to what, clean my hands before you pay me? Do you think that I’m contag-.”

“There is a way that things need to be done.” she repeated, colder this time. “Wash your hands before accepting payment.” Her fingers took a break from their music to mimic that same sweeping gesture, this time at double tempo.

“Alright, I get it. I’ll wash my hands.” He slowly plunged his palms into the icy water, watching the dirt and dust of the day peel off his skin, float away, and dissipate; clouding the water’s surface in a thin film.

“Three times!” she exclaimed.

“I’m getting there, ma’am.” he reassured, raising his hands only to signal compliance before digging them back into the basin. “So, what’s it worth?” he asked, wiping his palms down the leg of his jeans.

“Thirty dollars and an idea of time well spent, and ill disposed of.” she said, her fingers once again breaking their rhythm to join her hands in sweeping the objects into a desk drawer.

“I’ll take it.” he said. As the cash entered his palm and he walked out, the slight sound of rattling, a jingle of new money, and the tick of time could be heard, but that was the past and the past had been washed clean.

Later, in his home as he exited the shower as all people do, clean and a little bit lonely, he could not remember the events of the day. Nor could he recall the stresses of his past and the accomplishments made in spite of them. But that didn’t bother him one bit, he smiled, “There’s a way that things need to be done and it’s always okay in the end.” he repeated alone to himself.

*Ocean Terror*



*Whitney Morris*

*Icarus' Flight*

I find myself soaring closer and closer to the sun  
Your rays warming the sides of my cheeks  
As I remember the first time You held my hand  
While we went for a hike in the laziness of summer  
We swam as our bodies shivered together  
The electric current running between us  
Begging for us to touch so that we may ignite  
I fly higher, counting the time until I am with You  
I imagine when I get there You'll greet me with that smile  
The kind that makes me stop and stare  
And You'll ask me what I am looking at  
To which I'll tell You that I'm just taking everything in  
That's what I want us to do now, to take everything in  
Is this what love feels like  
To feel something so intense, so foreign, yet alive  
I'm sweating now, as I think about our last kiss  
Your lips were tender and soft as I bit into them  
My need to be only met with hesitation  
As You pulled away from me  
Am I too much for You  
Even now as I fly You seem to strip me down  
to my most flightless state  
they told me not pursue You, to get so close  
but I didn't listen, I just wanted You to consume me  
I'm falling now  
Harder than before- into the depths of Your darkness  
As You forget who I was and who we once were  
Me, a forgotten memory, and You a piece of me.

*Abigail Kauffman*



*Bereavement*

In the dead of night  
The full moon fell out of the sky  
It crashed to the ground without a fight  
For it knew it could no longer fly

The trees dripped tears of grief  
For though it is the sun that gives them life  
And nourishes them leaf by leaf  
It is the moon that cuts through the darkness like a knife

Without the moon their trail of tears  
Grows so large it soaks and rots their roots  
They deteriorate as the end nears  
In preparation they drop their fruits

They can't be saved  
Our path is paved

## *I'm Afraid*

“what are you so afraid of?” he asked me

this

i'm afraid of this

whatever this is between us

it's new and exciting and i've never felt like this before

i'm afraid of this

of the way my heart beats faster when i'm near you

and how it flutters when you say my name

i'm afraid of this

of losing you to someone who is better

and watching you learn to love her

i'm afraid of this

of being someone that you appreciate and admire

and pretending that i am enough to be that for you

i'm afraid of this

of falling for you

when i can't even love myself

i'm afraid of this

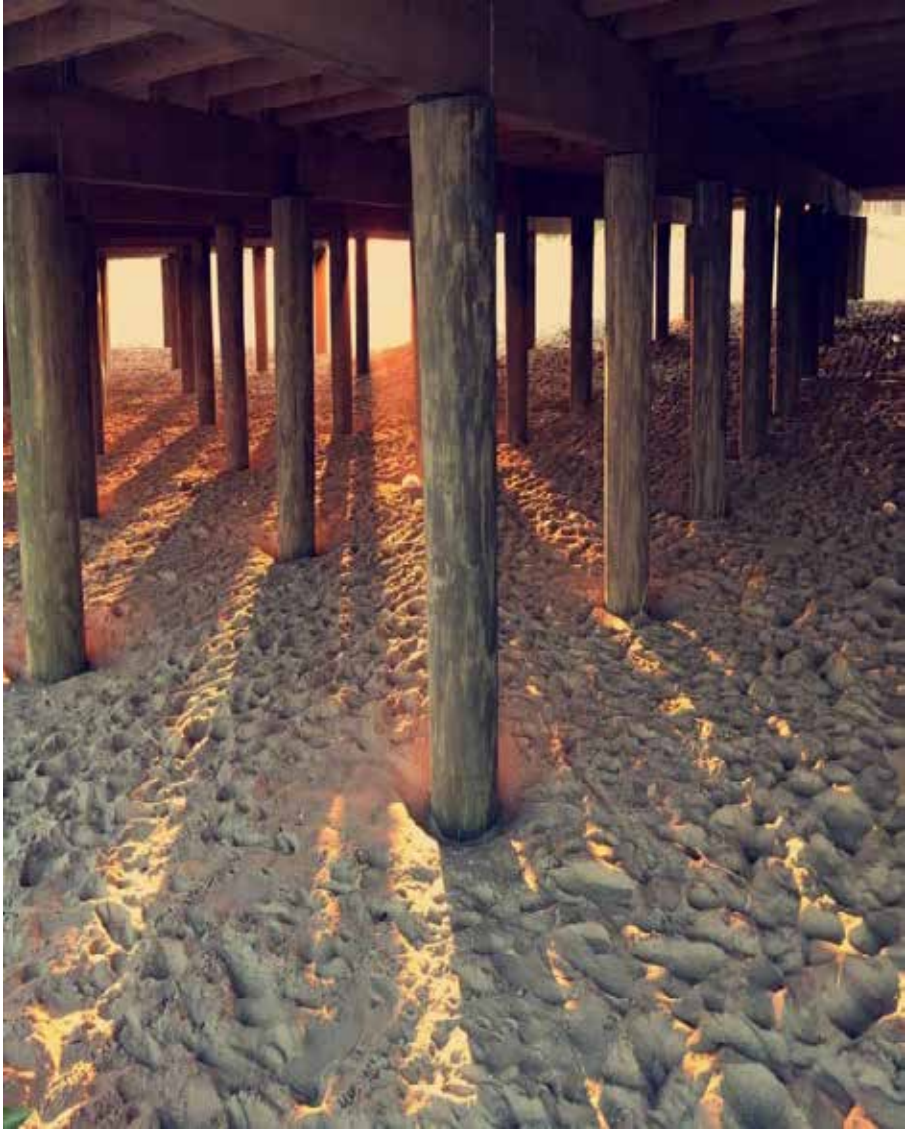
because i'm already

in love with you

“nothing” i whisper

*Rachelle Renninger*

*A Walk on the Beach*



*Kathryn Milliren*

## *Go to War*

A respected man from a downtrodden country  
Had talked of rebellion and talked of war  
And now his mouth is sealed and muzzled  
So he may talk no more.

His hands are bound, his feet are tied  
And his heads been placed upon a block  
A punishment for those who stray  
And give themselves to sinful talk.

For he had given many speeches  
To the men and women of the beaten land  
And gained from them a worthy trust  
Which helped him device a sinful plan.

On the day when they would break their shackles

And give to the government the rings of war  
The signal given to the peasant rebels  
Would be 3 knocks upon their doors.

But now the plan had thus been figured  
By the soldiers of the oppressive hands  
And thus to keep it from its starting  
They cut off the starter with their righteous bands.

Now the man awaits his fate  
Of death, which shall keep the people gored  
For at his death there will live no rebels  
For there will be no knocks upon their doors.

A man above the sinful man  
With cloak of blackness and axe of steel  
Strikes upon the chopping block  
And frees the man's head with wrathful zeal.

He lifts the head up in the sky  
 For all the people now to see.  
 He says "For those of you who sinfully talk,  
 This is what your fate shall be."

The men all gasp and women cry  
 For their sinful man is now brought down.  
 And with his death now dies their hope  
 And future honors drowned.

A man in the crowd now shouts with anger:  
 "Let us see at least the face.  
 Remove that muzzle from his mouth  
 So our eyes may gain a last embrace."

The black-cloaked man now smirked with glee  
 And started to unlock the muzzle:  
 "All you'll see is pure defeat  
 And the eyes of one both shocked and puzzled."

The face now free from conceal  
 Is lifted high up in the air  
 The black-cloaked man expects horrid yells  
 But instead they all just stare.

The sinner's head had a wagging tongue  
 Wet with blood from final wounds  
 Inflicted by 3 final bites  
 With crimson taste he left entombed.

It was a final act  
 A cry for renewal knocked on death's door.  
 For with three bites upon his tongue  
 The people knew:  
 "The signal's given. Go to war!"

## *Borrowed Lip Balm*

This lip balm tastes like someone else,  
like nice towels and dirty floors,  
like paint, now chipping, but once  
stuck cosmic wonders to the walls.

It smells like another life  
filled with warm bread  
and burnt pizza  
and close hugs  
and closed wounds.

This lip balm is pink  
and pretty  
and it isn't mine.

*Robert Greenberg*

*Gerontophobia: The Fear of Growing Old*

My age clings to my frame and  
I feel plain, like the walls I'm staring at,  
but when it feels like I've finally  
got ahold of everything,

like I'm coasting along that flow  
life is taking everyone else around me  
to reach much greater heights and destinations,

it turns out, actually, that feeling:  
Stability. Comfort. Ease. Whatever you call it.  
Isn't like a flowing river, it's closer to how it must be  
to drive a car, lose control, and wrap its  
metal frame around a wooden pole.

You might be hurt, your head's throbbing, and your body aches, and the  
mess it leaves  
might be big, scattered plains of safety glass and crisscrossed incisions  
of bumper, fender, and mirror. The pieces though,  
they can all be gathered up and picked off the road  
so as to not inconvenience any passerby's or gawkers.

But the big stuff, the frame, the windshield, the tires, and their axels,  
they have to go somewhere too. Somewhere safer than  
a cautionary kick aside and into the grass creeping  
its way onto the road. They need repairs, they need replacements.

Eventually, you can drive again,  
just in time to swerve right into  
your mid-life crisis like an older  
woman into the supermarket with a book  
full of coupon cut-outs:  
expectant, prepared, and imminent.

*Trent Betham*

*Jubilee*



*Madalyn Wolfinger*



*Love*

You convinced me  
That I was what was right in this world.  
In my darkest days,  
You reminded me to face the sun.  
I would revel in her golden glow,  
Letting my cold hands soak the up  
The energy they so lusted after.  
Allowing my eyes to admire the radiant light  
Shining on my pale, fragile skin,  
I was not omitted from her warmth  
As not I, your love.

*See Me*



*Anna Jedrejczyk*

*Push On*

You'll wake up,  
And peep out the window.  
An ominous fusion of gray and blue, Engulfed large portions of the sky.  
Howling winds  
Viciously rattles the trees like maracas.  
The lone crow,  
That sits dainty on the very edge of the roof, Screech the infamous tune  
of sorrow...  
Push on!  
Part of a dynamic,  
Far from perfect.  
In the heat of the moment,  
You're forced to choose a side.  
Dreading the inevitable scorn,  
From the side left ignored.  
The minions of three,  
cackle silently in corner.  
Push on!  
Carelessly dumped,  
In a bowl of diverse kinds of souls.  
The alphas,  
Of such undignified stature,  
Adored by many,  
Leaving peasants like you,  
alone with the rejects.  
Some savable,  
Others fade into obscurity  
A few,  
Forever challenge you,  
Till they've killed off the last bit of you. Push on!  
Piece together the puzzle,  
That was once your sanity  
Showcase a smile,  
That doesn't hide any hidden scars  
Break free from your old chain,

Bury it deep underground

Let the flames roar.

Reheat a shriveled, frigid heart. Stay...just stay and enjoy!

*Ernest Frazier*

**/or**

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